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**THE GRAHAMS OF INVERMOY.**

**VOL. III.**

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# THE GRAHAMS OF INVERMOY

BY

M. C. STIRLING

AUTHOR OF

"A TRUE MAN,"  
"THE PRINCESS OF SILVERLAND,"  
&c., &c.

AUREY. What's in the book?

HURST. Why, nothing new or strange;  
Honour and love do battle o'er a pledge,  
Calm lives flow on from childhood to the grave,  
And own the mighty bond of circumstance;  
A tale of every day.

*Love's Triumph*



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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# THE GRAHAMS OF INVERMOY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DREAMS FULFILLED.

THE two further years that Allan proposed spending in India had nearly elapsed, and leave of absence had been promised him, the permission being accompanied with complimentary speeches, of some value if taken as an indication that he was marked out for future promotion. In spite of himself he began to feel unsettled. Day-dreams obtruded themselves more frequently than was conveni-

ent, and so strongly had the thought of home taken hold of him, that he even sold a favourite horse, ostensibly because he had an opportunity of securing a good master for him, in reality because he found some satisfaction in commencing the arrangements for his departure.

The last three months of his stay appeared intolerably long ; he who had never known a day's illness began to suffer from the heat, his usual society became irksome, his daily duties a burden, and his friends shook their heads and remarked to each other that it was high time for him to go, or he would in all probability break down. While this restless mood was on him, he hurried into his office one morning to see the mail before going out to ride.

On the table, placed by itself, lay a large packet with an ominous black border and seal.

For a moment Allan hesitated to take it up, for he dreaded that it might contain bad news of his aunt. Another glance, however, showed him her familiar writing on a smaller black-edged wrapper, and relieved from his fears he opened the first packet quietly enough. One glance at the contents sent the blood to his face, and as he tore open his aunt's letter he sat down and spread it on the table, for his hands trembled.

"My dear nephew," it ran, "I have to tell you the sad particulars of the news that Mr. McHaffie has, as I understand, already written you. It seems that Ellen and our poor Duncan agreed to travel

with the d'Arblancs—the French family with whom they were so intimate—to Normandy, for part of the summer, Mr. d'Arblanc having some small property there. They went by diligence, which Ellen explains is a sort of coach, and stopped at small inns to sleep.

“At one of these, the last stage before reaching Château Vaclair, Duncan appeared to be ill and feverish, but he insisted on proceeding. They had a long day's drive, and the heat and dust were very fatiguing. On arriving at the château, they sent for a doctor, and he pronounced the complaint to be rheumatic fever, from which, as you know, he suffered once before, and after a short illness he died. My own opinion is that he had slept in a damp bed, against doing which I

have often warned you, my dear Allan.

“Poor Ellen says that the d’Arblancs were kindness itself, but it is an awful blow to us all. Jean Graham is like one out of her mind, and I wish that I had some one here to advise me, for I do not know how to comfort her. And between ourselves, Mr. McRorie the minister is not judicious. He thinks it so dreadful for Duncan to have died among Papists, and of course Jean is inclined to make too much of that already. It is terrible to her that her son should be buried in a foreign country—that seems less fearful to me, your dear father being laid in Spanish soil. Come home quickly, my dear Allan, for this trouble has aged me, and I need you much.”

To do Allan justice, very sincere feel-

ings of regret and pity filled his heart as he read, and when he had ended, he leant his head on his hands without attempting to peruse Mr. McHaffie's business letter.

He thought of his boyish friendship with his cousin, of the pleasant summer he had spent at Invermoy, and of Duncan's generous disposition and light-hearted ways. How readily he had shared his possessions with his visitor, and how good-humouredly he had submitted to be second to him in all their classes! How was it that the man had failed to fulfil the bright hopes the boy had raised? For that he had failed Allan felt assured, little though he had seen of him in town.

There had been a great soreness between the cousins of late years, and even now Allan could not feel that he only had been to blame.

No doubt Duncan must have regretted, or been even annoyed by his intimacy with the actress, but his mode of expressing this regret smacked too much of the righteousness of the Pharisee, and though Allan was quite willing to acknowledge himself a sinner, still the humblest Publican does not care to see the Pharisaical robe too obviously plucked aside as he passes by. He could not but feel that a kinder method of rebuke might have been of greater service.

He was glad that he and Duncan had at least parted in friendliness, for during the last few days of his stay in London, they had tacitly agreed to ignore any difference that had been between them. Still he could not grieve for him as for a cherished friend, and gradually a natural



exultation in his own good fortune made itself felt. This was indeed more than a fulfilment of his dream. That he should own the one place on earth that he loved, seemed such happiness that, with a touch of his mother's superstition, he almost feared that some correspondingly great trouble was in store for him.

With what delight he made his final arrangements; how gladly he undertook to carry a small parcel, first for one friend and then for another, till in the end he was obliged to have a box made on purpose to hold these commissions, a box which excited the suspicions of the Custom-house officers, who levied heavy duty on it, which Allan paid as cheerfully as he paid every other demand made on him when he first landed.

How pleasant was the journey on the coach to London, even though three or four sailors kept up a perpetual fire of songs and jest beside him. Has not Turner painted them, waving their hats and shouting their choruses as the four bays clatter along the road, and the dust whirls about the coach? Allan sympathised with the jolly tars, and forgave what was unseemly in their mirth with a clear conscience.

Arrived in town, he went first—where do you think?—to Mr. Barton's to see Agnes—to Fanny Jutsom's—no, to his tailor's, to assure himself that his newest coat was not too old to be presentable in town. It was out of fashion, Mr. Snips said, and of course must be replaced at once, but still it was passable, it would

not be necessary for him to seclude himself until the new one was forthcoming.

Fortified with this permission, Allan, having been duly measured for a complete outfit, betook himself at once to the Rector's house. Miss Barton was at home, and he entered the little hall with greater diffidence than he had felt in the Governor-General's ante-room.

Agnes was seated at her embroidery frame, and looked up quietly as the door opened, expecting only some of her ordinary visitors.

"Mr. Graham," said the servant, and at the familiar name the room seemed for a moment to swim before her ; but she was not an untrained girl now, ready to betray every passing emotion, and her greeting conveyed just the right degree of pleasure

at the return of an old acquaintance and connection.

A very few minutes, however, tried her sufficiently, and hurriedly explaining that her sister was in the house, but that she saw no one, and always left the room before any callers came in, she went to fetch her, lingering behind her a moment to steady herself.

Ellen was greatly changed since the night of Allan's farewell dinner at his cousin's house, and he felt, as he took her hand, that she too must be thinking of that happy evening. Although her face was thin and pale, and her close white cap and heavy dress were as hideous as the fashion of mourning required, her appearance was still striking, and the smile which had once been so ready on her lip

had grown sweeter as it became rarer.

"I suppose you remain here," said Allan, after he had heard all she could tell him of her husband's illness and death.

"I cannot tell," replied Ellen, a painful colour suddenly suffusing her face. "My plans are as yet quite undecided."

"Indeed; well, I hope I shall be allowed to hear what they are. I remain a short time in town. Is Mr. Barton at home? I have been remiss in not inquiring for him."

"Is our father in, Agnes?" asked Ellen, turning to her sister, who just then entered.

"No, he is gone out, and did not expect to return till dinner time," replied Agnes, and Allan saw a meaning glance pass between the sisters.

"He is seldom in at this hour," contin-

ued she, "but if you will come to luncheon to-morrow, Mr. Graham, you will be sure to see him," an invitation Allan accepted with pleasure.

That evening he went to the familiar theatre, where unfamiliar faces now appeared upon the stage. He had inquired of the waiter at his hotel if Miss Delancey were still acting, and was told that she was now very celebrated, but was difficult to please, and often did not appear for a while at all. She had quarrelled with more than one manager, and was now starring at Bath, —was rich, gossip said—could do as she liked, and was such a favourite that she knew she could always get an engagement when she wished one.

It was strange, indeed, to Allan to stand at the old corner and recall the throbbing

excitement with which he had waited there night after night to see his divinity, at first studying every play in which she took part, but latterly not heeding the words at all, only the speaker.

He realised how much he had altered since then, as he looked at the painted face of the leading actress, a sufficiently pretty woman, and tried to imagine himself wishing to make such a one his wife. Then his thoughts returned to a slender figure in black, with flushed cheeks and shy eyes, that he had seen that afternoon ; and suddenly discovering that he had completely lost the thread of the dialogue to which he fancied himself listening, he left the theatre.

He found the Rector a good deal altered,

and not for the better. His little affectations had become stereotyped, and he watched his guest furtively, as a man does who knows that he is acting a part, but is not confident that he can delude his audience. There was a new constraint about both him and his daughter that Allan remarked at once, all the more readily from its contrast to the easy life of Calcutta drawing-rooms.

Mr. Barton glanced once or twice at the clock, and when the hands were near the hour, he turned to his daughter with a nervous clearing of the throat that had become habitual.

"Ahem! Agnes, my dear, just ring and put off luncheon for a few minutes, I think Mrs. Gunn will probably be here."



It was easy to see that this was very unwelcome intelligence, but Agnes replied, stiffly,

“Indeed! I had better order another place to be laid.”

“I—ahem—have already done so, my dear,—I told Jane this morning.”

There was a look of pain and indignation on Ellen’s face, which did not decrease as her father went on to describe the expected guest to Allan, folding his hands and patting one on the other with ceaseless restlessness.

“I am glad to have so early an opportunity of introducing you to Mrs. Gunn. She is a widow, and somewhat wealthy; a person of character and influence. I am happy to number her among my parishioners, and, I may add, among my valued

friends. She has a great deal of information gathered in the course of a varied experience, and is most willing to bestow counsel even in cases where her intentions are misunderstood and her advice rejected. A strong character, my dear sir, as you will see."

"I suppose she considers punctuality a weakness; she is invariably late for luncheon," remarked Ellen.

3 "A woman with so much to do may be pardoned," returned the Rector, and as he spoke the door bell rang.

A very commanding person was Mrs. Gunn as she rustled into the room, attracting notice at once by her elaborate coiffure, her Roman nose, and the large miniature of the deceased Gunn which reposed upon her ample bosom. She frequently referred

to him in conversation, laying her hand upon his blond countenance and calling him her good husband. Doubtless he had ample opportunity for the exercise of many virtues, notably patience and humility. An expressive glance was bestowed upon the Rector even while Mrs. Gunn held Agnes by both unwilling hands; Ellen, adroitly passing behind an armchair, confined her greeting to a bow.

"I am quite grieved to be late," began the lady, in a high-pitched voice, "but you know, my dear Mr. Barton, how many claims there are on my time, and Miss Agnes will of course pardon me; she is too kind to be severe upon me. Mr. Graham, did you say? Ah! I have heard of you, sir, and am glad to make your acquaintance."

Allan bowed, and during luncheon said but little, observing with shrewd eyes the Rector's fussy anxiety that Mrs. Gunn should have whatever she preferred, while Agnes looked ready to burst into tears, and Ellen, whom the guest evidently regarded with no affection, maintained a frigid courtesy that yielded to neither blandishments nor attacks. After a while Mrs. Gunn addressed herself more to Allan, and speedily displayed complete ignorance of Indian, as she had previously done of French life.

"I suppose you have been entirely without society for all these years, Mr. Graham."

"Not entirely, I am happy to say, Mrs. Gunn."

"Really! But the society of the natives

of the country must be disagreeable, at least to anyone accustomed to London," simpered the lady.

"I was not alluding to native society," replied Allan, with a slight smile.

"Oh, then you had the society of—of—the others employed with you. No ladies, of course."

"We had a pretty good mixture, I think. There are always varieties in every society, as you are aware; but there were some ladies, and very agreeable ones."

"Indeed; I am quite surprised. Now how do they dress out there? You never saw the latest fashions, of course; such as this dress of mine, for example."

"Never," replied Allan, emphatically, while for a moment Ellen's gravity wavered.

"I think," said she, "some of the fêtes

you described in your letters must have been quite charming."

"And you moved in the best circles, I suppose, Graham," said the Rector, provoked at the other's taciturnity.

"I was in an extremely pleasant one, and that, after all, is the main point."

"Really, Mr. Graham must be ashamed of his acquaintances, I think, he is so unwilling to talk of them," remarked Mrs. Gunn.

"If I am, it is for the first time," said Allan, now laughing outright, and forgetting Somers Street for the nonce. "Surely the names of my acquaintances cannot be interesting, unless to anyone who has friends in Calcutta."

"You saw the Governor-General, I suppose," continued the unwearied questioner.

"Saw him! My dear Mrs. Gunn, Mr. Graham has been frequently at Government House," interrupted the Rector.

"You don't say so. I suppose at the State entertainments?"

"I have seen a variety of entertainments, Mrs. Gunn, and at all sorts of hours, too. A seven o'clock breakfast out of doors, to which we had all ridden, was charming, especially when we waited almost entirely on ourselves."

"Oh, did the Governor-General do that?"

"Frequently, and a great deal of important business is got through at these breakfasts, I assure you," said Allan, gravely, but the Rector, who was becoming uneasy at this jesting, signed to his daughter to withdraw.

"And I must be going; I have an appointment with a friend who is to bring me a card for a party at a most unexceptionable house, and who knows, I may be able to take dear Miss Agnes there some day," said Mrs. Gunn, laying a hand on the girl's arm while she looked at the Rector.

"My daughter would be delighted, I am sure," replied he. "I hope she will always appreciate your advice."

"At its proper value," said Allan, aside to Agnes, as she moved away; not a very pregnant remark, yet the speaker's face must have cheered the girl, for hers lost something of its cowed expression.

With a profusion of smiles and compliments, the Rector saw his guest to the door, and then drew Allan back to the



dining-room, which the sisters had quitted.

"What do you think of her? A striking woman, is she not? Sprightly and wealthy, too. Why were you so silent about your Indian experiences?"

"My good sir, why on earth should Mrs. Gunn want to know anything about my friends?"

"Well, you know, Allan, I look on you as a connection of our family, and Mrs. Gunn is a woman of society, and I was not unwilling, my dear boy, that she should do justice to your position and merits," replied the Rector, flinging himself back in his arm-chair.

"I am much obliged to you, sir, but that is not quite our Scottish way, I fear. I think my position, like my merits, can take care of itself," said Allan, whose High-

land blood was hotter than it had been for many a day, as he perceived that he, a Graham, was supposed capable of accepting patronage from such a woman as Mrs. Gunn.

“Ah, well, no doubt people’s views differ,” replied Mr. Barton, who had his reasons for wishing to stand well with his companion. “But now, if you have a spare half hour, will you favour me with your advice as to my unfortunate daughter’s affairs? You know, I suppose, how they stand?”

“Not I. You mean Mrs. Graham?”

“Yes. Bless me, have you not heard about it?”

“No; I returned by an earlier ship than I expected, so I have not yet received letters from my lawyers that will no doubt

put me in possession of the facts to which you allude."

"Dear, dear, it is singular that it should devolve on me, her father, to tell you how severely she has suffered. Why, she is a pauper, sir, absolutely a pauper, but for the paltry pittance that I can afford her myself. Far be it from me to speak ill of the dead, but my son-in-law's conduct during the last years of his life was most unsatisfactory."

"But I do not understand; is Ellen not provided for by the marriage settlements?"

"During her husband's lifetime only, and happily for my poor child, she has laid by a small sum, but hardly what would keep her in clothes. At the time of her marriage, I passed some anxious moments in

debating as to my duty when I found that she would have no jointure."

"But why not?" exclaimed Allan.

"Because the Invermoy entail is one of those that allows nothing of the kind. Considering Duncan's profession, I almost decided to break off the marriage; yet it seemed cruel to interfere, he was so very devoted to her. He promised to lay by something every year which might be left to her by will, but this promise he never kept. Ah, Mr. Graham, a father's responsibilities are very great, very great," said the Rector, with a sigh that fell on unheeding ears.

"Has Duncan left no property of any sort?"

"Not much; a little furniture, a horse,

and small library. All that is in Paris, awaiting your arrival for settlement."

"Why, what have I got to do with it?"

"You have a right to half, as the nearest relative. My daughter hoped you might like to keep Duncan's old charger. If not, she would take him as part of her share, and have him shot rather than that he should be sold to a master who might use him badly."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Allan, walking to the window, where he stood for a few moments, while his companion watched him from under half-closed eyelids.

"Mr. Barton," said he presently, turning round, "I am heartily sorry for all this—of course till I have heard from McHaffie and Spait, I have no knowledge of the state of

my affairs. But my cousin's widow must not be left in such a condition as you describe. Make your mind easy so far. I will write or call as soon as I can come to any decision."

"Thank you, my dear young friend, thank you—I was sure you would feel for a father's anxiety."

It is doubtful whether the Rector was right in this belief, as he perhaps suspected, though he maintained his air of depression ; but when Allan left the house his demeanour entirely altered, and any one who had seen him walking softly up and down his dining-room with his coat-tails over his arms, would not have supposed him to be at all an anxious parent.

"What an admirably shrewd woman Eliza is," thought he ; " I believe everything will

turn out exactly as she expected ; and then when I have kept my promise, and got Ellen off my hands, we shall see, we shall see," chuckled the Rector, before whose eyes visions of a luxurious old age rose temptingly, undisturbed by any reflections as to the probable unhappiness of the fair girl who had kept his house so carefully since her sister's marriage.

Allan returned to his hotel in a state of embarrassment that a large packet received next morning from McHaffie and Spait did not obviate.

"We regret to inform you," they wrote, "in answer to your inquiries, that a large expenditure will be required on the estate during the next few years. The late Mr. Graham was unwilling to incur the cost of new buildings, and the old ones were

repaired in many cases when not worth it. Two leases expire this year, and the farms will not let again without new steadings. Mr. Graham had ordered a considerable quantity of timber to be cut on the Whaup's Howe to meet current expenses, but very little had been done at the time of his death. The Home Parks will require re-fencing——”

So ran the dreary list of requirements and blunders, which Allan read with a growing sense that his position was to be something quite different from that which he had contemplated, and that, had he but known these facts earlier, he would have remained another year or two in Calcutta.

On the other hand, his presence was obviously a comfort to more than one



person. His aunt was longing anxiously to see him, Ellen Graham was dependent on his kindness almost for bread, and as to Agnes—if her pompous old father were really going to marry that widow, the house would be intolerable for her. To be sure she might find a home with her sister, but—what a sweet wife she would be, if he could have the good fortune to win her!

Meanwhile, it was clearly necessary that he should go straight to Scotland, and ascertain his exact position before committing himself to any definite course; but he must also see Ellen before leaving, and he accordingly called on her. At first she answered his questions with a stiffness and brevity that discouraged him, and after a moment's thought he went up to her,

where she stood nervously arranging the flowers in a white vase.

"Why won't you trust me, Ellen? Duncan and I were friends when we were boys, and my relationship and circumstances give me almost a right to claim your friendship too. I'm not clever at talking, but I want to say this: I'm alone in the world but for my dear old aunt, and I want to help you. Forgive me for speaking plainly; I do not think you are very happy here, and you would rather I spoke to you than that I should consult Mr. Barton about your affairs."

"Ah, yes! indeed I would!"

"Then tell me what you wish, and treat me as if I were your brother."

"I will, Allan. I need help. I want to do the best I can for myself, but I am

so lonely!" cried poor Ellen, her reserve vanishing at the sound of the honest voice and the sight of the frank eyes that were so like, and yet so unlike Duncan's.

"When pride thaws, then look for floods," and the ice once broken, she was only too glad to pour out her troubles to a sympathising ear. She confessed that her husband had lived more extravagantly than had been wise, but she had always hoped that things would improve, and indeed he had begun to be more careful.

"Perhaps I was to blame at first," she continued; "I was so busy with Madame Dufaure, and society did not interest me, and I left him too much alone. But it was not so afterwards; we were very happy, and he was always very good to me. When I found I was so poor, I was

frightened for a day or two; but then there seemed to me there must be some way to help myself. I came here" (she did not call it home) "to see Agnes and consult my father. Then I intended to go back to Paris and teach English and music; one can live so cheaply there; but Agnes implored me not to leave her, poor child. Oh, Allan, you see what is going on; my father is infatuated, and neither Agnes nor I could remain here if Mrs. Gunn were to be mistress of the house. I do not think she would allow me to stay even if I wished it."

"It would be out of the question," replied Allan; "a week of her company would be unbearable. Promise me, Ellen, that if anything unpleasant happens, if your father married her suddenly, for

instance, that you and your sister will come north. I know my aunt will be delighted to have you, and I shall feel that you are keeping your promise."

"I will, Allan. Oh, I think you are come home to set us all at our ease again."

"Then I'm a very lucky fellow. And now good-bye, my dear; I am off to Scotland in a day or so, and, as soon as I can, I will write to you about our future plans."

Allan had one or two other visits to pay before leaving London. He had already been to see some old acquaintances, and now he went to Robert Mackie's.

He found the modest little shop superseded by a large establishment, wherein was no room for the cosy evening's gather-

ings of old. The worthy baker, however, received a good many of his cronies in a comfortable little house adjoining the shop, and we may be sure the primest Glenlivat was produced for an old member of the original club, newly returned from the East.

On Mr. Dalglish Allan also called, and found him as punctual as ever, though, as he said, "I must allow myself twenty minutes now, where I used to take fifteen, to get to a place."

He was still garrulous about the beauties of Pitmaldie, and still declared his intention of re-visiting the glen, enjoying the expedition in anticipation so keenly that his friends thought that it would be a pity if he were to deprive himself of that pleasure.

Lastly, Allan delivered in person, as he had promised, a parcel containing one of the fabrics woven seemingly out of gossamer and gold leaf, for which the Delhi looms were famous.

The recipient was a lady of fashion, and a letter which Allan had left on his arrival, while his boxes were still in the Custom House, had prepared her to receive him graciously.

"He is, of good family, but a little *bourgeois* in manner," wrote her correspondent; "but you would know how to change anything that offended in him; and as he has now inherited an estate somewhere in Scotland, he might be a good *parti* for one of the Cavendish girls. At their age they should reconcile themselves even to an estate in Scotland."

Quite unaware of the honour intended him, Allan was slightly flattered at his reception. To be admitted into Lady Blanche's own boudoir, and offered a cup of her after-luncheon *café noir* (Lady Blanche had been abroad a good deal), was very pleasant, and pleasant, too, were the scents of flowers, the rich colouring of the furniture, the comfortable chairs, and the subdued light.

"Mrs. St. Leger tells me that you have come home to take possession of a property," said Lady Blanche, with an air of interest.

"Yes; it has come to me through the death of a cousin, who was quite young, and left a widow, but no children," began Allan, but the lady interrupted him.

He is indeed *bourgeois*, thought she; is



he going to give me a history of his relations !

“Ah, exactly,” she said ; “how very sad for her, though it is hardly so for you. No doubt you will remain in town for a while ; and I suppose you will take a wife home with you ; Mrs. St. Leger says you are delightfully domestic.”

Lady Blanche was not very young, and was noted no less for her plainness of speech than for her skill in arranging marriages. Whether they always turned out well is another matter.

“I hope to have a wife some day,” said Allan shortly, for he had a quick ear, and felt himself checked by the tone of the last remark.

“Ah, let me beg of you to be careful, my dear Mr. Graham ; such terrible mis-

fortunes ensue for want of a little judicious advice. You are young, and cannot have seen much of London society. We must not allow you to fall a victim to designing people, for your wife should have position. You require some one *qui sait son monde* to advise you. I feel inclined to help you myself, and so pay my debt of gratitude to you for bringing me that exquisite dress."

"You are very good," said Allan, with a half-smile, as he mentally compared Agnes Barton with the designing ladies against whom he was warned.

"Come to us to-morrow night," resumed Lady Blanche; "you will see a good many people, and it will be an introduction for you."

After a moment's hesitation Allan assented. It was true he had intended to go

North next day, but it was worth while to defer his journey for twenty-four hours, in order to be present at one of Lady Blanche's well-known gatherings. The reality, however, proved less charming than his anticipations.

As he listened to fragments of the conversation, he found himself recalling Mrs. Bounce and her Calcutta gossip, though the scandal here, if told in more polished phraseology, was of a broader sort.

A Miss Cavendish, to whom he was presented, did her best to amuse him, even while she thought that a very large estate would barely compensate for what she termed his provincial dulness. If he was amused, it was in spite of rather than by the help of her efforts, and he very soon moved on to a corner where he could ob-

serve the stream of guests as it flowed through the wide rooms. Here, to his dismay, he was discovered by Mrs. Gunn, who, in a rainbow-coloured costume, came simpering towards him, evidently glad to claim even one acquaintance in this brilliant crowd.

“Mr. Graham! I did not expect to find you here! Why did you not tell me at the Bartons that you were coming? we might have given you a seat in our carriage.”

“I did not know that you were coming, Mrs. Gunn. You did not mention names, you know.”

“Ah, to be sure,” said the lady, blushing, for she remembered that she had not been certain of getting her invitation when she met Graham at lunch. “But who got you

your card? I am quite curious to hear," she went on.

"Nobody," replied Allan; "Lady Blanche invited me herself."

"Lady Blanche! You don't say so! Have you known her long?"

"She is a friend of one of those ladies I was speaking of in Calcutta," answered Allan, smiling in spite of his annoyance.

"Good gracious! I had no idea! Now, Mr. Graham, you are so kind, I am sure you will introduce me to her. I came with a friend's party, but of course an introduction by anyone that Lady Blanche knows would be more agreeable," said Mrs. Gunn, looking as if she were ready to seize Allan's arm and march him off then and there to their hostess.

"I think one of your own party—some

lady—would be the proper person,” began Allan, quite determined not to accede to this request; but he was saved further trouble, for a tap of a fan on his hand, and an imperious “Mr. Graham, give me your arm,” from Lady Blanche herself, enabled him to escape.

“My warning was needed, I perceive,” said she. “Who is that person? I am sure by your face that she is not a favourite with you.”

“I saw her for the first, and I hoped the last time, two days ago,” replied Allan; “but may I ask, do not you know her?”

“I!” exclaimed Lady Blanche, with astonishment in her voice. “Oh, you mean because she is here. Oh, no. There are always plenty who wish to get admittance to one’s house, and their friends

beg for cards, but I know nothing about them. You ought to be in a different circle from that person."

"I am afraid, Lady Blanche, my circle will not be what you would approve, though I am most grateful for your kindness."

"You think not; then I fear that means that you are lost already," said Lady Blanche, with a smile. "I will sit down now; here, thanks. Ah, my dear Duchess, how are you?"

Allan felt himself dismissed, and guessed that his clever hostess would cease to take such an interest in him if she knew that he was already half a captive, and that he preferred simple Agnes Barton to the lady of position for whom she intended him.

This surmise proved correct. He was never asked again to — House, and Mrs. St. Leger was informed in one of Lady Blanche's witty epistles, that the *bourgeois* was too much enamoured of his kind to be rescued, and that the writer did not doubt that he had already proposed, and been accepted by one of his fellow-savages. She also hinted that Calcutta society was blunting her friend's perceptions, which suggestion caused a slight breach between the two ladies.

Altogether, Allan's confidence in his own judgment and opinion was strengthened by his evening's experience, and he even resolved that, unless circumstances obliged him to return to India, he would ask Agnes to be his wife before many weeks should pass.



He travelled North as rapidly as possible, and when he sprang out of the post-chaise at the door of Invermoy House, and received his aunt's hearty embrace, he tasted such complete pleasure as comes but seldom in a lifetime. Little indeed had he dreamt in his boyish days that his great wish would be so early fulfilled.

"Eh, my dear, my dear," cried Miss Mary, holding him at arm's length and scanning his face; "the Lord be thanked, you've come home to your own house! Ay, ay, you're looking well enough,—thinner a bit; but we'll set that right with a little decent feeding. I don't suppose you have ever tasted real cream since you left Scotland. You just want taking care of. Dear me, I must sit down, for my old legs are shaking like saugh wands," con-

tinued she, while Allan put his arm round her and led her to a chair.

“Where is Mrs. Graham?” said he, presently, looking round the room.

“Oh, my dear, she’s gone away! I thought I knew her well, and what she’d be likely to do, but I had no notion of the way she was going to take things. You mustn’t be vexed at her, Allan, though I did think she might have stayed to welcome you. And, my dear, I didn’t let all the people turn out to meet you, just because I thought we might have respect to her and to the dead; but if I’d been sure you wished it,” said Miss Mary, growing confused between love for Jean, devotion to Allan, and a sense that this tall, dark-haired man was very unlike the boy of her dreams.

“My dear aunt, I’ve had the welcome I wanted from you, and what does the rest matter? I don’t think rejoicings would be right when I’ve got the estate by chance, you may say. But where has Mrs. Graham gone?

“That’s the surprising thing. Not a word did she say to me about it, I’ll say that for her. She knew I was wearying for you, and she never breathed a word of the jealousy in her till I told her that you were in London, and were to be down soon; then she rose up,—she was sitting in yon chair by the work-table,—she rose up and said, ‘Then I’ll leave the house in two days’ time, for I’ll never see anyone in my son’s place.’ My dear, I was so dumb-founded, I thought sorrow had surely turned her brain; but would you believe

it, she had arranged everything, and packed some of her clothes ready to start. She's gone to live with Mr. McAndrew in Edinburgh, him that was minister here, you know ; and she's taken a servant with her, and another's to follow at the term. I daresay Mrs. McAndrew is glad enough to have Mrs. Graham, senior, of Invermoy, to lodge with her, though Jean was just the grieve's daughter. Mrs. McAndrew herself was not much more, and she is contented there, and likely to live on with them. There's no telling what people will do, though you've lived with them for years, my dear," concluded Miss Mary, who had hardly yet recovered from the shock of this sudden and silently planned departure.

With it, Jean Graham almost vanishes

from our story, for no persuasion ever induced her to visit Invermoy again. Perhaps, besides her jealousy of the new Laird, she felt that she was more at her ease in the homely circle of the McAndrew family. She received at first much pity and consolation as a childless widow, deprived of the pride and stay of her house, and the attentions bestowed upon her, together with the distinction accorded to her in the small festivities in which she gradually came to take part, soothed and comforted her sore spirit. Before long she began to interest herself in her friend's affairs, and soon became a person of importance at tea-parties and morning calls. Clad in heavy and perpetual mourning, she adopted a certain dignity of manner which filled Miss Mary with astonishment when she once

went to see her in her new home, and set Allan's mind entirely at ease as to her contentment with the new life she had chosen. She lived to a great age, and rewarded the attachment of the McAndrews' many daughters by leaving them everything she had to bestow.

Allan was not ill pleased to find that she had already quitted Invermoy; for, while desiring to have his home to himself, he had no wish to begin his occupation of it by requesting her to seek another abode. To Miss Mary, the first weeks of his stay were a period of absolute enjoyment. To make his breakfast, pouring the cream with a liberal hand into his bowl of porridge; to hear what he was going to do, and get a hearty kiss before he started for his day's work; to consult

the old housekeeper about his dinner, hunting up the best recipes in excellent "Meg Dodds," and even venturing experiments from newer books; then to take a rest of an afternoon, placidly dosing with spectacles pushed up on her smooth forehead, so that she might be ready to meet her boy briskly when he came home, such was the good old lady's day. And then the evenings,—how she enjoyed them, and what an unexpected amount of knowledge she displayed about the drains and steadings. Allan was surprised at it, till, returning one day by chance earlier than his wont, he found her asleep, with a book on farming open in her lap. Half in jest, he stole out of the room again, and re-entered with sufficient noise to wake her; but the instant she opened her eyes, she slipped the

volume under the work-basket by her side. Weeks afterwards, when he no longer feared it might vex her, he told her that he had found her out, and her reply touched him deeply.

“Ah, Allan! you’re all the world to me. Is it a wonder that I try to be something to you, that you may think of me pleasantly when I’m gone?”

In a very short time the new Laird’s name was in everybody’s mouth. The grievance went about his work briskly, feeling that his master might appear at any moment; the work-people on the place saw that their hands would be kept full; the farmers came with endless requests, the most pressing of which they felt pretty sure would be granted, though one or two of them found that a gentleman



accustomed to Eastern duplicity, was not likely to be deceived by their clumsy attempts to overreach him. Mr. McHaffie could not conceal his delight at the change, and in his dingy private room would rub his hands and call on his quiet partner to sympathise with him.

“Didn’t I tell you so, Spait, years ago ; when the boys were harebrained callants, getting their schooling from the minister, didn’t I tell you Master Allan was the best of the pair? Good looks and uniforms are mighty fine things among the women, but give me our new Laird’s common sense ! Not that he’s ill-looking either, though he doesn’t carry his head in the air as though a red coat made him better than other folk. Lord knows how many years of his thrift it will take before the

estate gets over the effect of his dandy cousin's folly !”

Mr. Spait, though he agreed with this verdict, added of course a warning against over-satisfaction.

“Mind the proverb,” quoth he, “‘ye needn’t cry cluck to your chuckies afore they’re out of their shell.’ And the Laird’s not wedded yet. Wait till we see what sort of wife he gets.”

Allan speedily perceived that he must be for some years a very poor man, and that, moreover, the sum he could allow Ellen was smaller than he had intended. Still it would keep her from absolute poverty, and he thought perhaps that, if things turned out as he hoped, she might make her home for at least part of every year at Invermoy. He had quite deter-

mined to win Agnes for his wife if he could, and only waited till his affairs were thoroughly arranged, and he had accustomed his aunt to the idea, before writing to Mr. Barton.

Wise Miss Mary guessed at the cause of the reveries that sometimes encroached on his evening's work, and one night she broached the subject that he was fearing to introduce.

"When will you be seeking a wife, Allan?"

"I, aunt!" answered he, with a very conscious air.

"Ay, you. Bless the laddie, does he think my eyes are blind because they're old! Tell me, my dear, for I just long to know what's in your mind. Have you seen anyone you fancy?"

"Yes, aunt, I may as well confess I have," replied Allan, smiling.

"Is she in London?" inquired Miss Mary, eagerly.

"Yes, but how did you guess that?" asked he, in great surprise.

"Will you have to wait a weary while? There, I must speak out—is it Ellen you've been thinking of?"

"Ellen! no, I never thought of her for a moment. She and I are great friends, but I am sure we could never be more. It is her sister Agnes."

"Ah, well," sighed Miss Mary, leaning back in her chair. "It would have been just too good to be possible if you had brought her back here, where we all grew so fond of her; and so it is Agnes—the Lord bless you both, if you win her!"

"My dear auntie, she is very sweet and gentle, and will be a loving niece to you, I hope," said Allan, seating himself by the old lady. "I did not like to speak of it for fear of grieving you, or I would have told you what was in my mind."

"My dear, you need not have feared. I am not a jealous woman like poor Jean that I should grudge you what you want. And do you not think when my time comes to die, I'd wish to leave you with a bonny wife and bairns about you? Eh, Allan, you men do not know what kind of love a foolish old body like me gives away!"

"Indeed, we do not, Aunt Mary; if we thought more about it we should be better men perhaps," answered Allan, kissing her fondly. And then the pair began the sort of conversation that is pretty sure to take

place when one is a lover talking of his lady, and the other is a woman of Miss Mary's years who loves the speaker.

It was fortunate that this explanation had occurred, for ere long Ellen wrote to both her cousin and aunt, declaring that neither she nor her sister could tolerate much longer the treatment they were undergoing in their father's house.

"We have not been told that there is any engagement," she wrote. "Yet there must be some understanding, for Mrs. Gunn is here daily, and my father consults her in everything. Yesterday they discussed a pie that did not quite please her, as if Agnes had not been present, and at last Mrs. Gunn actually told her that she had better have it done in a different way, as if she had been a ser-

vant. You can fancy the tone with which she spoke. This morning my father found fault with our dresses, saying that our mourning, even mine, was too heavy, and that Mrs. Gunn would call this afternoon to advise us and take us to a shop before asking us to drive with her in the park. I replied that we were not children, and that we would neither discuss our clothes with Mrs. Gunn nor would I at least accompany her to any public resort. My father was furious and insisted on Agnes going, and she, poor child, could only submit. What can we do under these repeated unkindnesses?"

Allan's reply to this was brief and to the point.

"I shall be with you as soon as possible,

dear Ellen ; come home with me, and see my aunt, who needs you, and ask your sister if she too will come, not as a guest, but if I may say it, as my wife. I am not skilful enough to plead my cause on paper, but I hope and pray that I may do so with success ere long. Do not tell Mr. Barton that I am coming."

After the receipt of this letter, Mrs. Gunn's criticisms and impertinences were powerless to disturb the two sisters, and when Allan arrived and informed the Rector of the object of his visit, the latter was considerably surprised, though his satisfaction was great. He passed a good many disagreeable moments with his intended son-in-law, who made no attempt to hide his opinion of his behaviour. Moreover, sup-



ported by Allan, both the girls protested so strongly against Mrs. Gunn's presence at the wedding that the Rector was obliged to yield the point. He did so with such obvious fear that Allan hoped a rupture might be brought about between him and the widow. She, however, was not to be so easily balked, for what affection she had to bestow was given to Mr. Barton, his comfortable house, and respectable position. She therefore made but one effort to be confidential to "her sweet Agnes" on the subject of her engagement, but finding her embraces received with coldness, and her proffers of help in the choosing of the trousseau politely but decidedly rejected, she withdrew, and wrote next day to express her regret that a pressing call to a sick relative at

Bath would prevent her from having the pleasure of seeing her dear young friend married, thereby assuming as a matter of course that she was to have been invited.

The sisters breathed freely when she was gone, and their modest preparations being speedily made, Agnes was married in the same church where she had once stood as her sister's bridesmaid.

Some days before the ceremony, when Allan was proposing that Ellen should come to Scotland, the Rector took the opportunity of announcing his approaching union with Mrs. Gunn, pointing out in affecting language that he would feel his house very desolate when both his dear girls should have left him. No one attempted to congratulate him, and the

chilling silence was broken by Allan saying that now of course Ellen must come North with them.

"But you would like to be alone. You need not look so reproachfully at me, Agnes, it would be very sad if it were not so—you see I know," said Ellen, with a tremble in her voice.

"Yes," said Allan, "and for the same reason Mr. Barton must be left undisturbed. I will tell you what, Ellen, you and Aunt Mary shall go to the Cottage together for a while, and then come to us. That would do admirably for both of you."

"I will do that gladly, Allan. I shall like to see Agnes settled in the old place before I go back to my work in Paris."

"What!" cried the Rector, "are you

going to abandon your relations in that way?"

"Father," returned Ellen, quietly, "you know perfectly that Mrs. Gunn and I are quite dissimilar in our tastes and habits. I cannot live always at Invermoy, and my heart yearns for the dear friends who knew my Duncan so well and the streets where I have walked with him so often. I have long determined that if you did not need me I should return there."

In accordance with this plan, Ellen travelled to Scotland with the newly married couple, and went on alone to the Cottage while they remained to see the sights of Edinburgh. It was hard for her to return alone to the place that she had hoped would be her home, but not a spark

of jealousy or bitterness burnt in her heart. She grieved for her own lost happiness, but rejoiced in that of her sister with a generous joy. Not a heart in the village but was stirred by the sight of the young widow, and the bride might have been less cordially welcomed had her sister expected her less eagerly.

The travellers arrived on a day of fresh breezes tossing the young corn, of bright sunshine and swift showers, and as Agnes drove under the arch of evergreens that spanned the gateway, a rainbow hung above the green slopes of her home.

In a couple of days the Laird was seen walking with his wife to the Cottage, where all sorts of preparations had been made for their reception, and an hour later Ellen took her to see one or two old

friends, notably Kate Macrae and Elspeth Morrison.

The sisters formed a great contrast, the one tall and somewhat pale, dressed in black, and moving with a certain stateliness, the bride blushing and shy, a little self-conscious, but full of anxiety to say and do the right thing towards the strange looking people that had been kind to her sister.

Before a week had passed, Ellen felt that her day was over. It was natural, no doubt, but still she observed it with a half-amused sadness. It was to Agnes now that the first greetings were given, it was her bridal attire that was noticed, her remarks that were welcomed, and though there was always a kindly word for Ellen herself, she detected pity in the speaker's

tones, and said to herself, "My work here is done, it is time that I were gone."

Perhaps she would not have come so quickly to this conclusion had it not been for one incident.

On coming in from her walk one day she found Agnes seated on the broad stool at Miss Mary's feet—that was usually her own place,—and perceived that they were talking eagerly when she interrupted them. Then indeed she felt a pang of regret, and realised that she was no longer as necessary, even to Miss Mary's comfort, as she had fancied. She was not to leave, however, without seeing a small but most unexpected cloud shadowing her sister's happiness.

On the first Sunday after her arrival, a severe thunderstorm had prevented Agnes

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from going to the kirk, but on the second her husband led her between groups of villagers and under the ruined cathedral arches to the family pew in the kirk, directly below the pulpit, Miss Mary and Ellen following them. The latter had not disliked the Scotch service formerly, for good Mr. McAndrew had always preached simple and earnest discourses, and in her happy youth, with her husband by her side, she was prepared to accept any form of religion that he chose.

With Agnes it was different. She was older than Ellen had been at the time of her marriage, and more wedded to the familiar ritual as it was quietly, not to say sleepily, conducted at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. She had learnt to find comfort in it, filling up, out of her own emotional



nature, the sober outline of religion presented to her by her father. Unfortunately, on this particular occasion there was a guest at the manse, who had of course been asked to preach.

Mr. Crummie was a tall bony man, with unkempt black hair, wide mouth, and stentorian voice, and belonged to a class even then beginning to pass away, and whose parallel it would now be hard to find. He was well known for his peculiarities of manner and diction in the neighbourhood. Had he not in his own church at Croustyburn pointedly addressed a lady who had not been able to repress a smile, in these words, "You, laughing there—and in mournings too!" and had he not gone on to threaten her with pains and penalties because of her levity? On ano-

ther occasion he had interrupted his sermon to rebuke certain shepherds for "exchanging snuff mulls from the east gallery to the west gallery of the church."

Now, with the Invermoy party seated in front of him, he exerted himself to the utmost, feeling that here was an opportunity of upholding righteous doctrine in the ears of one who, being an Englishwoman, was probably opposed to Calvinism, if not possessed by all kinds of heretical beliefs. Leaning over the pulpit, so that his voice seemed to pierce the heads of those below him, he gave the rein to his eloquence, and after swaying as it were from the terrible to the grotesque for forty minutes, he wound up with this remarkable peroration :

"We may liken the just in this world,

my brethren, to a pot of potatoes that are being boiled. They tumble and jumble and bubble and roar on the fire of afflictions ; and while the wicked man, like the bad potato, remains untouched and his heart evil, the just comes out of the trial with his skin burst, his heart soft and mealy,—and that, my brethren, is the true potato !”

By this time Agnes felt her cheeks burning with mingled shame and horror at a sermon that seemed to her as irreverent as it was undoubtedly vulgar. But her sufferings were not yet over, for there was the long prayer to be endured. Mr. Crummie loved to ask for a blessing on as many officials as possible, and in his own parish ended his catalogue with “that vera decent body the town-crier.” Here,

however, he was more moderate, though he still used his favourite concluding formula, "And now what wait we for?" a singularly vain question in the mouth of one whose subsidence the congregation expects with subdued hopefulness.

The last syllable was hardly uttered when the people began to move, but Agnes hurried out so quickly that a whisper arose, as she passed, that the heat must have made her feel ill.

Crossing the churchyard, she walked to its farthest corner, as though to admire the view of the distant hills, but when the others came up to her they found her in tears, and the flash in her eyes as she turned to them startled them.

"How could you take me to such a place?—how can you go there, Ellen, you

who know what a church is? Why did you not tell me what it is like? It is hateful, monstrous, and I will never go into that building again!"

"My dear," exclaimed Ellen, while Miss Mary stood aghast, but Allan drew his wife's hand within his arm.

"You had better come with me, Agnes. Put your veil down, and we will go by the river-side; we will talk this over by-and-by."

For a moment Agnes hesitated, then did as her husband desired her, and the two went home alone.

"Who would have thought that bonny girl could have looked so angry?" said Miss Mary, as she and Ellen took the road to the Cottage.

"I am as much surprised as you, auntie.

I know that Agnes has very strong feelings on church matters, but I had not thought she would be so put out."

"Put out, indeed!—the idea of a young thing like her saying she would not go into the church my fathers have worshipped in for generations! You were not so high and mighty, my dear."

"You must allow that Mr. Crummie is not a pleasant specimen of a minister," said Ellen, smiling.

"Perhaps not, but he's not our minister; and what ails her at the kirk itself, with the names of godly men and women written on its walls? Ah, well! I'm but a foolish old woman, for I am getting as angry as Agnes herself," sighed Miss Mary, whose family pride in the kirk had been sorely hurt.

Agnes proved less easy to pacify, and she and her husband sat far into the night arguing on this sudden difference. Easy as he had been on every other subject, Allan was inflexible on this—that his wife should fulfil the duty of every mistress of a household, and attend public worship.

“But not every Sunday, Allan,” said she, beseechingly, trying to succeed by gentleness, since resentment was of no avail.

“That is to say, you are not strong enough to do your duty once a week,” replied her husband, not ungently.

“Allan, think how differently I have been brought up, and how strange I feel. Why, I cannot even kneel down to pray as I have been taught.”

"No doubt it is a little hard on you, dear, but you will grow accustomed to it in time. I will not insist on your going every Sabbath," said Allan, who had fallen into the ordinary Scottish phraseology, as if he had never left the country.

With this concession Agnes was forced to content herself, but she poured forth her trouble freely to her sister next day, adding that she had been half afraid of her husband, for she did not know he could be so firm.

Ellen's sympathy was less complete than Agnes desired, for her life in Paris had taught her to be tolerant.

"Really, Agnes, I do not think you should be miserable about it; and as for Allan, why, my dear, every man expects his wife to obey him."



“Not in matters of conscience, Ellen,” said her sister, hotly.

“I hope your conscience will not prevent you from sharing in a worship the form of which differs from your own. I have prayed in a Roman Catholic church, and come away comforted.”

“Ellen, I could not have believed it of you !”

“Why not? The first time I did it I was weary and troubled, and as I walked along I saw the doors open, and heard the priest intoning in a side chapel. I went in, and there, in a dark cool corner, I knelt down. Oh, Agnes, don’t make vain sorrows for yourself. One can pray anywhere; and as to the kirk, ask Aunt Mary what kind of men fought and died for their faith in Scotland. Go and look at that grand old

ruin, and see if your heart does not soften to the folk in the kirk alongside, though its walls are bare, and its ministers not like ours in England."

Ellen's voice and face were so earnest that her sister could say no more; but she returned home with the feeling of religious isolation in her heart that is the curse of so many good women.

In due time Ellen took her departure for Paris, where Madame Dufaure welcomed her as though she had been a daughter, and Concha and her boys overwhelmed her with caresses.

She established herself near the Hôtel d'Arblanc, and was soon busy and quietly happy. She wrote regularly to Miss Mary, who always kept her latest letter in the work-basket, where her knitting needles

often lay idle for hours, for the old lady was apt to doze away a good deal of time now-a-days in her arm-chair.

In spite of her Sabbatical difficulties, life became a very pleasant thing to Agnes Graham. The critics of the neighbourhood, however, were not thoroughly contented with her. Shrewd eyes saw that she did not love the kirk, and owed her a grudge accordingly.

Kate Macrae, worthy Mrs. Murdoch, and others of their stamp, were quite satisfied with her pleasant voice and words, and cared nothing for her religious views; but such stern believers as Elspeth Morrison denounced these milder spirits as time-servers and palterers; others, again, thought her too quiet, and this opinion was shared by Mrs. Buchanan, of Glenmoy Castle, who

“could not think what the Grahams saw in these English people,—she herself could not understand their ways.” But then, as Mrs. Buchanan had four grown-up daughters, and had intended one or other of them to be mistress at Invermoy, perhaps she was prejudiced.

Agnes, for her part, felt sure that she was in a quite satisfactory state of mind when she told herself that she would willingly be friends with the extremest Calvinists, forgiving them their bigotry as a thing to be expected from those brought up in so blind and heathen a fashion. The sheep could hardly be blamed for feeding on the only herbage allowed them; but for their shepherd, their misleader, no reprobation could be strong enough. Unfortunately, Mr. McRorie, the young minis-

ter, lost no opportunity of increasing her dislike to him. In his eyes she was one of the lost, an admirer of organs, music, and papistical rites, a dangerous influence in his parish, to be counteracted by the exercise of his utmost zeal.

Invermoy thought it his duty to invite the minister every now and then to dinner, and Agnes, sitting at the head of her own table, loving quiet and the refinements of life, suffered positive misery on these occasions. Mr. McRorie's rough hair, harsh voice, and unpolished manners were a distress to her, while his injudicious allusions to the difference of opinions between them, irritated her so that she failed to perceive the real kindness of heart that lay below his unpleasing exterior.

Though she obeyed her husband, and attended the kirk with tolerable regularity, she shrunk from the doctrines she heard there. And Mr. McRorie, perceiving, that his vivid pictures of everlasting torment, and his belief in the hopeless depravity of human nature, made her wince, pressed both subjects into every sermon, thinking thereby to arouse her, instead of which he only confirmed her dislike. This dislike increased to a serious degree when she found that her husband intended the child she was about to bear to be brought up in the faith of his fathers.

It was Miss Mary who succeeded in altering his determination. She had come up to stay at the house, and soon saw that Agnes was allowing this one subject to prey on her mind, though she said little,

and Allan had no idea how deeply it affected her.

One night, soon after she had brought a boy into the world, Miss Mary went up to her room, and found her crying bitterly.

"Eh, my bairn, what ails you?" asked the old lady.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, you don't know, you none of you understand, how miserable it makes me that my baby is not to be christened in my own church. It is as if Allan wanted to put an everlasting barrier between us! if I had known it I think I would never have married."

"Oh, hush, hush, Agnes, let me talk to Allan about it, and see what can be done."

"He is so hard, aunt. I think Scotch people are all iron about their religion."

"Ay, maybe we are. The iron entered

into our souls in the persecutions, my dear, and perhaps it has never got out of our blood," replied Miss Mary, smiling. "But do you go to sleep, and I will see if I can get you what you want."

"Ah, if you could I should be happy," sighed Agnes, and her aunt forthwith returned to the drawing-room and took her nephew to task.

"Allan, my dear, you're taking all the heart out of that girl's life; she is not the same creature she was."

"I, aunt, what on earth have I done?"

"Do you not see that her one wish is that her child should belong to the English Church?"

"And are you going to turn against me too, aunt? What would be said if I, an elder of the kirk, allowed my child to be-



come a member of another communion?"

"Well, my dear, I have many queer thoughts in the long hours when I'm too weary to do aught but sit in my arm-chair, and I doubt we are all over-mindful of what folk say. I think your wife's peace is of more consequence than the opinion of a hot-headed young minister, and the village elders, decent bodies though they be. If I were you, I'd let Agnes have her way, and bring the sunshine back to her bonny face; the bairn can join the kirk by-and-by all the same." Before Allan could reply, Miss Mary was summoned to her niece's room, and an hour later returned with an agitated face.

"Go up to your wife's room at once, Allan, and promise her anything she wants, or you will rue it before morning. She

is fretting herself into a fever, I fear."

Thus admonished, Allan hurried upstairs, and after a word or two with the anxious nurse, assured Agnes that her boy should be christened in the English church at St. Magus, as soon as she was well enough to go there. His acquiescence in her wish soothed her better than any medicine could have done, and she fell into a quiet sleep and was soon on the road to recovery.

When all anxiety was over, Allan reflected with some annoyance on what had passed. It was true he had never told the minister explicitly his intention respecting the boy; if he had, he would have resisted his aunt's persuasions, for to break a promise given was in his eyes an unpardonable crime. But a thing may be quite

well understood, though it has never been said, and he felt as if an unfair advantage had been taken of him, and as if he must look more than foolish in the eyes of his household and friends.

He soon found, however, that his position was more justly estimated, for everyone knows that there are times when the most determined head of a house must submit to the feminine authorities who rule the hour. Even Mr. McRorie was constrained to admit as much, though he spoke under instruction, not from personal experience.

Meeting the nurse one day in the grounds, he stopped to talk to her, for she was an old parishioner. After duly gazing at the shapeless bundle which either contained, or was, the heir of In-

vermoy—he could not have told which—he alluded to the current gossip about its mother's illness.

“So this young gentleman is to be taken to St. Magus, and christened in the prelatical place of worship there. It is a sad thing for an elder of the kirk to allow such a thing in his family.”

“Hoot toot, Mr. McRorie, a man's a man as weel as an elder, and Invermoy couldna have helpit himsel'. Wad ye ha'e had him see his bonny leddy deein' maybe, and just haud his tongue?”

“Well, not just that exactly.”

“Not exactly! It wad ha'e been murder, and nae less. Elder or no, a man maun dae as he's bidden whiles, and a fine thing it is for him tae, as ye'll find for yersel' ane o' these days, sir,” replied the

worthy nurse, with a twinkle in her eye, and the minister was fain to laugh in his turn as he bade her good day, while she added that "the bairn wad likely be for following the ways o' his faithers yet, and might be an elder in good time," echoing the suggestion that Miss Mary had adroitly made to her nephew.

A very happy group stood round the font in the little church of St. John's a few weeks later, when the much talked-of christening took place. Ordinary custom required that the boy should be named after two of his grandparents, and Allan was secretly pleased at the readiness with which his wife had waived the claim on her side, since he cordially disliked his father-in-law. The truth was, that the mother's heart was so full of joy that she

cared little what name was chosen, as the method of giving it was to be orthodox. The little heir was therefore named Ian, after his paternal grandfather, and Duncan after Ellen's husband, and Allan, as he looked at his wife's radiant face, felt that, after all, it might be wiser to encourage such sunshine even at the expense of a grain of orthodoxy.

In this way a more complete life began for the pair, and in time Agnes ceased to remember that her husband had yielded, not to her earnest wish, but to the pressure of necessity. In their happier mood both began to enjoy what society was available in the neighbourhood, and even made an expedition to Edinburgh for part of one winter, taking Miss Mary with them, to her own unbounded astonishment.

It was on this occasion that they paid a visit to Mrs. Graham senior in the McAndrew's house.

Jean received them with considerable gravity, showing some emotion at the meeting with Miss Mary, but completely chilling the pretty cordiality with which Agnes had advanced towards her.

Mrs. McAndrew, who was more simple and much more hearty in her greeting, insisted that they should come to an evening party got up expressly in their honour. Agnes would gladly have escaped, but the others assenting, left her no choice; and on a certain Wednesday, about six o'clock, she came into the sitting-room at the hotel, where her husband and aunt were already waiting for her.

"Does my dress please you to-night,

aunt?" asked she, slipping off the white shawl that hid her flowered silk..

"It is very pretty, child; you always are pretty. But, my dear, are you not going to wear your diamonds? I think you should have some of the Invermoy jewels on to-night."

"Do you, auntie? I thought I might wear these Indian ornaments instead, they are very handsome and uncommon. Mrs. Graham would be sure to notice the others, and it might vex her, you know."

"Quite right, little wife," said Allan, approvingly, and Miss Mary, too, patted her shoulder kindly.

Matron as she was, everyone treated Agnes as though she were still a young girl. It seemed natural that so fair and tender a creature should be always young,



for, except on one subject, no one ever saw impatience on that gentle face.

The party proved pleasanter than Agnes had expected, for Mrs. McAndrew had done her best, and had gathered together some of the celebrities of the town. There were talkative ladies and learned professors; Robert Chambers, with his massive head and quiet humour; one or two young painters, whose names were beginning to be known; and "the rose of Pitlyal," with that sedate air that gave zest to her sparkling talk. Amid such attractions Agnes had no leisure to feel oppressed by Mistress Jean, who sat on the sofa, upright and sombre, the centre of a small circle of serious and sympathising admirers.

During this visit to Edinburgh, a proposal was made to Agnes that was the

germ of many a heart-burning among the staunch Presbyterians of Invermoy.

She and her husband had so far modified each other's views, that each went to hear a noted preacher in the other's church; but Allan was hardly prepared for a suggestion, made quite as a matter of course by his wife, that the clergyman from St. Magus should visit Invermoy occasionally, for the purpose of reading the English service. After a moment's hesitation, he replied,

"Well, my dear, you are welcome to ask him now and then, if it is any comfort to you to read with him. I will promise not to have Mr. McRorie to dinner while he is there."

"Thank you, Allan, that is very nice of you; and suppose anyone should wish to join

me, you would not object, would you?"

"Who would wish it? There isn't an Episcopalian in the place, except yourself."

"Are you sure, Allan? I rather think there are one or two; at least, the bishop said so."

"The bishop! So it is he who has been putting this into your head, is it?"

"Yes, it was, Allan; but do not be angry, dear, he said it could of course only be if you did not dislike it. It would do nobody any harm."

"H'm—I'm not so sure of that. Mr. McRorie will think it a terrible falling away. Seriously, Agnes, there must be no trying to persuade people to come; but you and any Episcopalians you can find may do as you please."

Delighted with this permission Agnes

began to make inquiries the day after her return home, and found, as she had been told, that Bright the new grocer had belonged to her own church, though he had wisely kept the fact to himself, when he left Edinburgh for a stronghold of Presbyterianism.

He and his family at once agreed to attend, and arrangements were speedily made for a curate from St. Magus to come to Invermoy once a month, and read the service in Mrs. Graham's own boudoir.

The first rumours to this effect were discredited in the village, the Laird, it was said, would never do such a daft-like thing; but when the curate appeared by the Saturday coach, and Bright, his wife, and three grown-up daughters were seen going to the house on Sunday, the storm

that burst might have disturbed a weaker man than Allan. Mr. McRorie alluded in his sermon to "heresies that are springing up in our midst;" some of the elders spoke to Allan about it, and even his county neighbours with one or two exceptions expressed that politely incredulous surprise that is a severe form of criticism.

To one and all the same reply was given—

"I promised my wife she should have her way, and I never break my word. If you think me so much in the wrong I will resign the eldership, but Mrs. Graham will continue to have her monthly service."

As no one wished to be deprived of the Laird's assistance, they agreed to condone his offence, but loud and long were the

arguments in the village parlours over this unexpected misconduct, and wonderful were the tales that got abroad respecting the doings of the curate.

Mr. McRorie, in his righteous indignation, endeavoured to persuade his parishioners to leave Bright, and give their custom to the older shops. One or two took his advice, but most of them found it better to listen only, though they may have compounded with their consciences by buying an occasional bit of cheese or a pound of meal from the orthodox grocer. Kate Macrae expressed their views with her usual straightforwardness when the minister sounded her on the matter.

“Would it not be well,” said he, “to avoid frequenting Bright now? Scott is a worthy man, and it would be better to sup-

port a member of the kirk rather than one that is bringing dissension into our quiet village."

"Weel, Mr. McRorie, ye see I've nae cause to quarrel wi' Bright mysel'. We've aye keepit friends, and I carena whether he gangs to the kirk or no; but I care fine about the pickle o' tea and sugar I buy. Noo, Scott's nae doubt a worthy man, forbye being an elder, but there's sand in his sugar for a' that, sae I'll just get mine frae Bright."

Honesty proved the best policy in the grocer's case, and when one or two of the county families asked permission to join Mrs. Graham, and a room was required for the service, he let a vacant one in his house for the purpose, trusting that the ex-

cellence of his goods, like charity, might cover his sins ; nor was he disappointed.

Time had perhaps cooled the village wrath, for custom will make the presence of even " a wolf in sheep's clothing," as Elspeth Morrison termed the clergyman, a matter of indifference when it is found that he is a peaceable animal, not given to poaching in other folds.

The curate was a tall and delicate youth, and when the idle boys jeered at his clerical attire, he felt that he was enduring persecution, and tasted a feeble joy.

Once on a slippery winter day he and the minister were passing, on opposite sides of the way, as became them, when a small child slipped and fell, just as the mail-coach thundered into the street. Both



rushed to the rescue, but it was the curate who caught up the child, and was himself helped out of the way of the horses by Mr. McRorie. The two men looked at each other for a moment, then Mr. McRorie said, "That was a near escape. Thank God you were quicker than I. Run awa to your mother, Jeannie, and tell her Mr. Langton has saved your life."

"I think I should have been down, too, but for you," answered the curate, and the two shook hands and somehow felt less inimical to each other thereafter.

## CHAPTER II.

## LIVES ENDED.

**W**HEN little Ian was about two years old, another child was born, a girl this time, who was named Mary Elspeth.

The Grahams were in Edinburgh at the time of her birth, and Agnes was disappointed to find that she would miss the chief attraction of the season, a five nights' engagement of the great actress, Miss Delancey. The theatre was not popular in Edinburgh, but an exception was always made in favour of this lady,

who acted Shakespeare, whom it was of course right to study, and who was, moreover, a person of exceptionally correct demeanour and conduct.

On this occasion Massinger's play, "A New Way to pay Old Debts," was included in the performance, and though regretful letters appeared in the papers, and the manager was assailed with comments and reproaches, it was singular that the house was even more crowded than on the other nights. Everyone exclaimed that the play was improper, yet somehow the dress circle was filled, so it may be supposed that the grave inhabitants of Modern Athens were not proof against the charm of Miss Delancey's face and manner.

Some close observers said that since her last appearance she had contracted a curi-

ous habit of looking round the house on first entering; it might be unconscious or it might be a studied effect, but she undoubtedly did it every night. They failed to detect the angry pain with which she acknowledged to herself that her search was useless.

Before she came to Edinburgh, her old friend the manager had sent her a Scotch paper, with some complimentary article on a new play, and looking over the other columns she saw among the guests at a certain great dinner Mr. and Mrs. Graham of Invermoy. It was after this that she strained the cords of the manager's friendship almost to breaking by demanding leave to perform as Lady Allworth, and it was when she was about to appear in that character that she realised how strong a

hold the memory of Allan had upon her. She easily discovered where he was staying, and fully expected that he would come and see her act.

In that small house she was sure she should find him out, but when three out of the five nights had passed without seeing him, anger and pique prevented her from writing to offer him a box, as she had half thought of doing.

The same motives helped her to outshine all former efforts, and night after night saw the sober audience roused to such unwonted enthusiasm that when the play was over people looked at each other in amused surprise.

Allan was in a divided frame of mind when he knew that his old divinity was to be in Edinburgh. He felt some curiosity

to see her again with maturer eyes, while at the same time he had no wish to be recognised by her, or, in the event of a recognition, to pain her by his avoidance of her.

Soon after his marriage, his wife had told him how well she remembered all that had passed in the tapestry exhibition, and he had assured her that his boyish fancy was a thing he regretted, and would fain forget. Nevertheless, she watched him as he slowly perused the notice of the first play in the morning's paper, and asked him, with a shade of anxiety in her tone, whether he intended going to see Miss Delancey.

"I do not know," said he, frankly, looking up. "People will wonder why on earth I stay away when everyone else is

going. I cannot plead engagements on all five nights, and I confess I'd like to see her again."

"I wish I could have gone with you," replied Agnes, uneasily.

"Why?—to see if the sight of her affected me? Don't look so serious, little wife. I may be curious to see what sort of woman made such a fool of me without a thought that would be treason in your eyes. Dear, can't you trust me? Surely my bairn's mother need fear no other woman."

"No, I believe she need not," said Agnes, flinging her arms round him. "Go, dear, and tell me what you think. I shall not be afraid."

So Allan went, not to the dress-circle, where, even if a place had been procurable,

he would have feared the keen grey eyes of the actress, but to an upper gallery, where, with his bonnet pulled low on his forehead, he defied recognition either by her or his own friends. So it fell out that she never knew that he was in the house, and left Edinburgh disappointed and indignant, only comforting herself with the certainty that he must have heard her praises on all hands.

He, on his side, admired her almost as much as formerly, though in a perfectly different way.

He could understand and appreciate now the vigour and fine restraint of her acting, as well as the beauty of her person, and acknowledged to himself, after seeing her three times, that, were he still a free agent, he would not answer for his main-



taining the perfectly critical position he had intended.

Probably he did not express this opinion to his wife ; but though she professed herself quite contented, and sympathised with his enthusiasm, she was secretly glad that Miss Delancey's London engagements prevented her from often visiting Scotland.

As it happened, she never appeared on the Edinburgh boards again, for a couple of years later, when performing to a crowded London house, a staircase that she was descending gave way, and after a few minutes' suspense the manager came before the curtain to tell the startled spectators that the play must be stopped, for that the great actress had been severely injured by her fall.

Allan read the notice of the accident

aloud with sincere expressions of regret, which his wife, now grown more matronly, echoed as she poured out his tea.

Both, however, were too much occupied with their own affairs to spend much thought on the subject, and it was by mere chance that they afterwards heard that Miss Delancey had quitted the stage, being determined not to invite comparison with her former successes by appearing again with a halt, however slight.

Her household, her children's lessons, her prize poultry, and the wants of her poorer neighbours, occupied Agnes entirely, and between the care of his now flourishing estate and his interest in certain mercantile ventures, in which he was always engaged, her husband's time was also amply filled.

Years had slightly modified Mr. McRorie's zeal and softened Agnes's antipathies; yet there was still a tacit feud between them, which Allan had come to regard as part of the natural order of things, neither to be interfered with nor regretted.

The talk this morning at the breakfast-table ran chiefly on an event which was exciting great interest in the village.

"This is the day of the Dewar presentation, is it not?" asked Allan.

"Yes. I wonder what the women will do with their money. I do not suppose they ever had so much to spend as they pleased before."

"How much did you say it was?"

"About two pounds each, I believe. It was to Mrs. Murdoch that Dewar made

the original promise, that he would prove to them in ten or twelve years that emigration was a good thing ; and just fancy, in all that time only one of the people who were present has died."

"It speaks well for them. I suppose old Elspeth is not to attend at the office?"

"Oh, no ; she cannot leave her bed ; so Mr. McHaffie is to send her the money, and some one will read her the letter Dewar wrote with it. Elspeth will be kept in snuff to the end of her days, and peat as well."

"How proud Aunt Mary is of that fellow's success ! I do not wonder so much at it now," replied Allan ; "a man who keeps his word so faithfully deserves esteem."

“Yes, of course; but do you know, Allan, both Ellen and I have always thought Aunt Mary had a most romantic affection for him.”

“Eh? Well, I never saw the like of you women for imagining things. The idea of my good old aunt being romantic about Jamie Dewar!”

“You may laugh, Allan, but if you saw the interest with which she reads his letters, and would remark how regretfully she speaks of the time when he was here, you would agree with me that there’s more in it than we know. She remembers everything she has heard of his Australian life as well as possible.”

“Bless her kind old heart! I daresay she does. But there’s no romance in that. However, I know better than to contradict

you on such subjects. I suppose you will go down to the Cottage this afternoon?"

"Yes, very likely I shall see the people as they leave Mr. McHaffie's. I hear there is more illness in the Moyle, and I must ask if anything is wanted."

A severe winter, followed by an unusually wet spring, had told heavily on the poorer inhabitants of Invermoy, and in the low-lying street, where the river sometimes rose to the very thresholds, a low fever had broken out, which was gradually assuming a more malignant character. Timid as she was in many ways, Agnes was fearless as to infection, and her little pony-carriage was seen almost daily at some door or other, with a basket on the front seat, full of good things for the sick.

Mrs. Murdoch, her ruddy face full of

amusement, was coming out of the attorney's office as Mrs. Graham drove down the street.

"Good day, Mrs. Murdoch," said the latter, checking her pony. "You are all bound to approve of emigration now, I think!"

"'Deed we are that, Mrs. Graham. It's no mony a laddie that wad ha'e keepit a promise like yon, made just in joke like. He's a man ye can depend on, is Jamie Dewar. We maun get Mr. McHaffie to send a letter till him, frae the haill o' us by the neist ship."

"You should indeed. Has Elspeth got her share yet?"

"Ay, mem, but she disna tak' muckle heed o't. Will you see her the day?"

"Yes, I am going there now," said

Agnes, driving on to the worn stone outer stair with broken hand-rail, that led to Elspeth's attic. The old woman lay on a bed in the corner, covered with a faded patchwork quilt. A peat or two glowed on the little hearth, and a kettle sang beside them. Everything was clean and neat, for Mrs. Murdoch "sorted" the little room daily.

A faint smile crossed the withered face as Agnes entered with a kindly greeting.

"I was wussin to see ye, mem," said Elspeth, slowly. "There's gowd yonder. I dinna ken hoo I got it. Peggy Murdoch tell't me, but I canna mind——"

"James Dewar sent it," began Agnes, but Elspeth interrupted her.

"Ay, that was it. But he's but the instrument—it's the Lord sends a' gifts.



I'm no needin' it. Tak' it tae Hughie, Mrs. Graham. Ye'll ken when I dee that there's eneuch siller in the cogie on the shelf to bury me. Gi'e the gowd to the laddie."

"But, Elspeth, you should spend some of it, you might make yourself comfortable with this. Get more peat, or tea, or snuff."

"Ay, a pickle o' sneeshin disna cost muckle, and the laddie wadna grudge it me. I'll tak' ae shillin' oot o't, Mrs. Graham, but ye'll keep the rest. Hughie needs it mair nor me."

No persuasions would alter the old woman's determination, so Agnes took the money, tolerably sure, however, that honest Hughie would spend most of it on his grandmother's needs.

The other recipients of Dewar's gift consulted each other as to the spending of the money, and some of them tried to persuade Kate Macrae to buy herself a bonnet in which to go to the kirk.

"There's naebody wears a mutch but yersel' since auld Grannie Cameron deed, Kate."

"The mair reason I suld keep to mine then, to let the young hizzies see what way their forbears covered their heads. Ye may haud yer wheesht! Gin I lived to a hunnerd years, nane o' thae tappy-towrie things wull I pit on my auld heid. Maybe you'd ha'e me wear a *mantle* like Peggy Murdoch's niece Janet, when she cam frae Edinburgh. Losh! the lassie lookit like a pyet! Thinks I to mysel', there's no muckle sense in the inside when

there's siccan a show on the out! That's no what folk'll say o' my wise-like auld mutch."

"What'll ye get then, Kate?"

"That's mair nor I can say. I'm no ane that maun aye be daein' somethin' whether it's needed or no. Fules are aye gettin' or gangin', I'm for bidin' a wee. A gude blanket or maybe a big chair to set by the ingle wadna be amiss, but I'll no determine the noo."

"Weel, Kate, it's a gude thing ye haena a man, he'd be sair guided I'm thinkin'," replied Mrs. Murdoch, laughing.

"Ay, wad he," retorted Kate, grimly, "ye ken the sang, 'Blithe is the blink o' my ain fireside.' *My* fireside's my ain, and that's mair nor ony o' you can say that ha'e man and hairns about ye."

Kate always had the best of an argument, and some of the wives when they reached home and found the "man" in a doubtful humour, or the bairns cross and hungry, felt that her last thrust was keener than usual.

On a subsequent visit to Elspeth, Mrs. Murdoch informed Agnes that there were fresh cases of fever in a poverty-stricken house in the Moyle. There had been a night of heavy rain, and the Moy was foaming along, a brown torrent with creamy waves that in the early dawn had flooded some of the houses, and still swirled every few moments across the muddy path. Even in fine weather there was barely room for a carriage to pass, and now neither Agnes nor the little boy who had succeeded Hughie, could induce

the sturdy pony to face the stream. She got out, therefore, and picking her steps as best she could, made her way to the miserable cottage. At the door she met Mr. McRorie, who hesitated to let her pass.

“This is something worse than we have had yet, Mrs. Graham, the doctor talks of typhus, and I don’t think you should go in. The mother and two children are ill, and the father’s but a helpless sort of body.”

“Oh, poor things, I must see what can be done for them; there’s some jelly in the carriage, if you would not mind fetching it, Mr. McRorie,” replied Agnes, quite ignoring the minister’s caution. He stood aside, therefore, and when he had brought the basin of jelly, found her gathering the scattered peats, arranging the tattered coverings over the invalids, and rousing

the miserable father to helpfulness by her pleasant tones and promises of assistance.

The minister watched her for a moment or two from the doorway, and then, as he saw her kneel down and administer spoonfuls of the cool jelly to the sick woman, it did strike him that, whatever her faith, her works at least bore witness in her favour.

Often as he had heard of her visits, he had seldom met her in his rounds, and had never seen her in a sick-room. His hours and hers were different, each had rather avoided places where the other was likely to be, and the feeling that existed between them was so well known that no one thought of mentioning them to each other.

A second time, however, they met in this cottage, when the patients were recovering, and Agnes on her side was so

pleased with the simplicity and sense of a few words she heard him say that, as they parted at the door, she shook hands with him, instead of bidding him good morning with her customary formal bow.

“I hope you are taking care of yourself, Mrs. Graham ; you are looking pale, and this is a terribly wet road,” said the minister, with equally unwonted cordiality.

“Oh ! yes, I have only got a little cold,” replied Agnes. “How I wish my husband could persuade Mr. Buchanan to improve these houses, it is very wrong to leave them in such a state ; but he always says they may stand till they fall, and then they will not be rebuilt.”

“And for how much sickness is he responsible till then ?” exclaimed Mr. McRorie. “He must have a hard heart to

be so careless—we all wish Invermoy were landlord here,” he added; and Agnes smiled, well pleased that her husband’s tenants were better cared for.

Turning into the High Street, she drove to the Cottage, where she found Phemie’s good-humoured face unusually anxious.

“The mistress has no been weel the day,” whispered she, as she ushered Agnes into the drawing-room, where Miss Mary sat shivering over the fire.

“Why, auntie, what ails you?” asked Agnes. “Why did you not send for me?”

“Because I knew you would come some time or other, my dear bairn. I think, though, that I will go to my bed now that you are come. I’m not myself at all to-day, and my poor old bones ache sorely. Let me see, is everything put away tidily



here—I don't like to leave things in disorder, in case I am not up to-morrow."

"Did anyone ever see your room in disorder, auntie? Come away, and I will see to it afterwards."

"No, no, my dear, I will do it while I can. This drawer must be locked. Let me see, why are my keys not in their right place? Dear, dear, I have not mislaid them for years. Ah! thank you. Now my book that I was reading lies here, and my work goes into this cabinet. There, that is all, I think," said Miss Mary, taking a last look round the room ere she left it leaning on her niece's arm. She never entered it again, for very soon fever declared itself, and before many days the doctor pronounced her case hopeless.

Allan had been greatly alarmed on hear-

ing that his wife had been running such risks of infection in the Moyle, but no such consideration weighed for a moment when good Miss Mary was taken ill. Both he and Agnes were constantly in the house, and the gentle invalid seemed to find her chief comfort in their presence.

One day Mr. McRorie came at her request to see her, and her bairns, as she called them, joined willingly in the prayer. When it was over, she glanced from the minister to Agnes, and spoke feebly.

"All one flock—one fold at the last for all whose hearts are right. You two have not seen it, but I see it clear as day now. One fold and one shepherd—put away strife from among you, and be at peace."

"She is right, Mrs. Graham," said the young minister, "I have thought too much

of law, and too little of charity, but I have learnt a lesson of late that I will not forget."

"And I too have cared too much for forms, and only the meanings matter where she is going," replied Agnes. "I hope you and I may be better friends in future."

Thus to the end Miss Mary was a peacemaker who might well be called blessed.

She was followed to the kirkyard by well-nigh the whole population of the village, and her coffin was placed in the family vault close to that of her cousin, the late Allan Graham. After the funeral some one remarked that this had been a mistake, for that that place would be wanted some day for Mrs. Graham, senior,

now living in Edinburgh. But when that day came, it was found that Jean had directed that she should be buried by Mr. McAndrew's church, to which she had already devoted all her spare funds. So Miss Mary's coffin remained in the place she herself would have chosen out of all others.

Great was her nephew's astonishment when he found that a snug sum was left to him, for James Dewar had long since repaid with interest the capital that had been lost in the failure of the St. Magus county bank.

On overlooking his aunt's papers he also found a letter addressed to himself, in which Miss Mary gave him the history of her acquaintance with Dewar, in order, as

she said, that he might appreciate the courage and honesty that had helped her to fulfil her dearest wish.

“My dear old auntie, she did not think anything of her own patience and unselfishness,” exclaimed Allan, as he read the simple record. “Agnes, we must not keep this money to ourselves. Let us spend at least part of it in some way that shall keep Aunt Mary’s name alive in the village.”

Agnes assented gladly, and after some discussion it was agreed that a fund should be started to provide fuel and food for the poor in winter, to be called Miss Graham’s fund.

Early in summer Ellen Graham came over from France to pay a long-deferred visit to Invermoy.

After the heat and glare of Paris, the quiet of her sister's home was delightful to her.

Each day, on the whole, resembled its predecessor, yet with sufficient variety to prevent these tranquil folk from feeling dull.

When her housekeeping was over, Agnes, with a child on either side, went to her poultry-yard, where her arrival caused a jubilee, for well did the inhabitants know that the white basket on her arm contained choice fare. Then she would go on to the garden and gather a bouquet, or hear the old gardener's opinion on some cherished plant. The children's lessons occupied the rest of the morning, and school-boards being as yet undreamt of, Agnes thought her easy

tasks were an ample education. It is true that the gamekeeper and the gardener helped to instruct Ian, while sedate Elspeth was already initiated into sundry culinary mysteries, inasmuch as she loved to sit on the table and see the making of cakes and puddings, dipping a tiny spoon into the mixtures that she might taste and judge of their condition.

After luncheon the pony-carriage was brought to the door, and the two sisters went for long drives, rejoicing in the breezy air of the moor, or, when the days were hot, they would sit with books and work under the deep shade of the beeches by the river.

The whole atmosphere was peaceful. Agnes was happy with her children, and if Allan was convinced that his own opinion

was always right, there was this to be said for him, that he usually had a good deal of reason on his side, and that he was kind and just, not only towards his dependents, but towards his wife and children.

Only one thing disturbed Ellen's tranquillity ; on her first arrival she had thought her sister worn and pale, and her health evidently did not improve. Her husband said that she had been over-fatigued in nursing his aunt, while Agnes herself confessed that she had caught a bad cold in the spring. Not wishing to cause alarm, Ellen said but little on the subject ; but one afternoon, when the sisters were alone in the boudoir, Agnes broke a long silence abruptly.

“ Ellen, if anything were to happen to



me, you would take charge of the children, would you not?"

"My dear, why should you say that?"

"Because," replied Agnes, holding up a tiny garment she was fashioning, "I have thought more than once that I may not recover when my baby is born. Don't argue about it, for I know all that you can say, and have said it to myself. Very likely I am full of fancies, still such things do happen sometimes, and in case—will you promise me that if I die you will come here and take charge of my little ones?"

"That would have to be as Allan chose."

"And Allan would choose. I told him before Elspeth was born that, if anything happened to me, I wanted you to bring them up."

"Of course I would do that, or anything you wished, dear," said Ellen; "but, you see, you had this fancy before, and it proved only a fancy."

"No, I had not. That was the fear every woman has, but this is different. We will not talk of it, only I am glad you have seen the kind of life we lead here now," answered Agnes, rising and leaving the room to hide the tears in her eyes.

Whether she had a presentiment of her fate, whether such a thing is possible, or whether the fulfilment of her fear was a mere coincidence, matters little. Ellen's promise had not been demanded in vain, for the birth of a son in August cost the mother her life. The suddenness of the blow completely stunned her husband; his self-reliance failed him, and his determina-

tion was of little use in the face of such a misfortune. He now turned to his sister-in-law for advice in a manner as new as it was pathetic in one so calm and decided. Alone in the world as he was, Ellen felt that her duty was clear, even had her promise been less solemnly given. She therefore wrote to the d'Arblancs to forward her few household goods to England, and established herself finally at Invermoy.

## CHAPTER III.

## MUST HE KEEP HIS WORD?

THE *St. Magus Chronicle* was not largely supplied with news, and, therefore, recorded faithfully every event, from a birth to a "kirn," or harvest home, that took place in the county families.

Perhaps that was the reason why it was taken for some time by Mrs. Brown of Bull Lane, London. Not that she ever opened the paper; on the contrary, she usually received it with a snort as of disapprobation or scorn, but she took great

care of the numbers nevertheless, sometimes forwarding them at once by a messenger to a fresh address, oftener laying them aside in a certain drawer, whence they were occasionally taken out in a heap by a visitor and examined; some of them being preserved, while others were flung down as useless. On a sultry afternoon in September this process was going on in the ordinary way. The reader, a very beautiful woman, had tossed aside a long dark cloak and bonnet with thick veil, and had turned back the wide sleeves on her rounded arms as she sat before the open drawer.

Mrs. Brown meanwhile was getting tea ready, trying to make the kettle boil on the smallest possible fire, so as not to increase the heat of the room.

"It is as hot as if it were the dog-days; it must be going to thunder. Won't that window open any wider?" exclaimed the lady, fanning herself for a moment with a half-opened paper.

"I'm afraid not, deary; it's hot everywhere to-day."

"Especially in Bull Lane, I think. Well, I shall soon have done—there's nothing worth looking at in these stupid papers."

As she spoke she held out the whole sheet that was in her hand, and in another instant had sprung to her feet, with a cry that startled the old woman.

"My! what ever is it? You nearly made me drop the kettle. Deary, Miss Fanny, now, what is it?"

"What is it? Why, the chance that I dreamt of, the luck that I thought was

impossible, is turning up ! Surely it will not slip through my fingers ; it cannot, it shall not !” cried the reader, her face flushed now and brilliant, as she walked the little room with slightly uneven steps.

“ Lord love her,” murmured Mrs. Brown, “ what’s she after now ?—she’ll turn my poor old head some of these days. Miss Fanny dear, do ’ee, now, sit down and have your tea.”

“ So I will, you dear old soul, and I’ll sleep here to-night. The little room is ready, I suppose. And, nursie, have you heard anything lately ?” asked she, with a significant glance in the direction of the street.

“ Nothing new, deary, same as usual—a bit worse, maybe—more stupid-like and quieter. Takes an awful lot, he does.”

"He does, does he? Well, I'll go there to-night," was the reply, and the speaker sat down to her tea with a set expression on her face that made the old woman shake her head regretfully.

That evening after it was dark, a tall figure in a long cloak and heavily veiled bonnet emerged with Mrs. Brown from the house, and turned down the lane to a broader street that crossed it. Here they waited a few moments, till two of the newly-organised police came by, and after a few words with them Mrs. Brown returned home, while her companion went on her way between her two guides.

Fisher Street scarcely merited the name of street, lane or alley would have been more appropriate.



At its lower end many of the old houses had wooden upper stories that projected over the uneven footway, casting black shadows on the rough stones, that were wet and slippery here and there with foul water and refuse. Gas was not in use so far eastward, and the only lights were swinging oil-lamps, or flickering dips that burnt on the low counters of the dingy shops.

One or two windows were better lighted than the rest, and round these grimy crowds congregated, those who had money passing in to buy fiery spirits at the splashed and dirty bar, those who had none lingering outside in the hope of a "treat."

Bursts of drunken song alternated with noisy quarrels, and men looked distrust-

fully at each other, for life was held cheap in Fisher Street.

Higher up, beyond Bull Lane, there was a gap where a house had been burnt some months ago. Here, against the blackened walls and charred timbers that remained standing, a few sheds had been run up, in which homeless vagabonds sheltered alongside of rag and bone collectors. They were mostly empty at this hour, save where one or two dark figures bent over a battered saucepan or a brazier of dull coke.

Passing by this gap, the policemen turned to the left, and proceeded up a narrow and silent passage, and through a little court.

"There doesn't appear to be a soul here," said the lady.

"Do not be too sure of that," answered

one of them. "If you were alone you'd be robbed here as sure as you're alive. It's a regular thieves' den this." As he spoke they reached the bottom of a steep wooden stair, and one of the men remained on guard below, while the other, calling out, "Are you at home, Carter? We're coming up," began to mount the steps with the lady.

Stooping under a low door, the pair entered a room about fourteen feet square; four beds placed side by side almost filled it, while a huge fire threw a flickering light on a broad hat, a coloured print, and a cracked looking-glass on the wall.

The small window was covered with cobwebs, and the air was faint with a heavy, sickly smell; on one of the beds lay the man addressed as Carter, clad in a brown

sort of dressing-gown, white stockings, and shoes with turned-up toes. His costume suited well with his flat Chinese features, small head, and black hair, and showed that he had little claim to his English cognomen.

He looked up lazily at his visitors, and then continued his occupation, preparing pipes of opium at a tiny lamp, and smoking himself at intervals.

"Is there no one else here?" asked the lady presently, in a disappointed tone.

"Yes," replied Carter. "Oh! it's you, ma'am. I didn't see you. Oh! yes, he's there. I am making this ready for him." And he passed the pipe to another recumbent figure, whom the open door concealed.

"Have you plenty of opium, Jutsom?" asked the policeman, at a sign from his companion.

"Yes, plenty. Carter treats me handsomely. He's a good fellow, Carter," was the reply, in a dreamy, monotonous voice, that contrasted strangely with the abrupt tones of the questioner.

"Seen your wife lately?"

"No; and don't want to. Don't want to be disturbed. What's the good?"

"Have you been drinking lately?"

"Sometimes. Got tired of it. I like this best. Now I've answered enough questions. Another pipe, Carter."

Fanny stepped forward and lifted her veil.

"So you don't want to see your wife," she said, quietly.

The opium-eater sat up, rage contending with stupor on his haggard face.

"What! is it you?—must you hunt me even here, to torment me with your sneers and hard words?"

"I come to keep you in the luxuries you want," said she, laying down some gold by Carter. "That's for your opium, and this is for yourself."

"Ah, you'll give it me now, though you grudged me a sixpence to save me from coming here. But I know what you want; you wish me dead, and I won't die—I'll live to spite you!" cried the wretched man, working himself into a frenzy and pouring forth abuse in louder and louder tones.

"You'd best come away; I didn't bargain for this, and there'll be a row if this goes on," said the policeman, roughly,

interposing between the bed and his companion, who went downstairs at once without a word, while Jutsom shrank into the corner and lapsed into maudlin tears.

“He’s always like that when she comes,” said Carter. “He’ll be quiet in a minute. Here, Jutsom, here’s your pipe.”

The policeman shrugged his shoulders and followed Mrs. Jutsom; but his tone was scarcely so respectful as it had been when she bid him good-night at the corner of Bull Lane.

She did not speak when she re-entered Mrs. Brown’s room, but drew a heavy arm-chair to the window and sat down. The old woman watched her for a while ere she remarked, cautiously, as though uncertain how far she might venture,

"Found things as usual, deary, eh?"

"Oh, yes, a little worse, perhaps, but not much. How long is it to go on? How long am I to be tied to that man, when I am thirsting for freedom—now, too, of all times!"

"You know your affairs best, you were always so clever ; but if I were you, I'd let him live on here. Who'd know that he wasn't dead?"

"Plenty of people—one or two of his own friends who hate me, and would spoil any scheme of mine. No, no, it won't do, nurse ; I've played my cards carefully till now, and I must not lose my head over the last hand. You'll go on just as usual, and be heedful about those papers—I can trust you, at least, after all these years."

"Well, my dear, considering all you've



done for me, and how comfortable you've kep' me, just in return for bits of things I could do for you, I wouldn't play you false now. Besides, I am fond of you, Miss Fanny, and always was, since you were a slip of a girl in your father's house, and used to talk to me about handsome Tom Jutsom. Eh, dear me, that's long ago !"

"Yes, and you helped me to be a fool. Well, you've tried to make up for that since, I must say; and as you wouldn't have a roof over your head if you failed me in any way, I am pretty easy about you. Now go to bed and leave me to think."

Far into the night Fanny Jutsom sat revolving her future proceedings; after her retirement from the stage she had been received with great kindness into a certain

society, and had conducted herself with the utmost propriety, evincing a preference for perfectly irreproachable ladies, and bewildering a few of her Somers Street friends whom she happened to meet, by the increasing gravity of her demeanour. So far she had been tolerably well amused, but she was beginning to weary of such an existence, and to long for something freer and less severe. She had been meditating going abroad, and had come to see the papers at Mrs. Brown's as a preliminary, when she stumbled on that particular number that upset all her plans.

To secure for herself an unquestioned position was the great object she had set herself to attain, and no temptations were likely to induce her to forego it. With her, as with many of us, that which was

most unlike her present lot, appeared to be the supreme good, irrespective of its proper value.

Now, though, she could have mocked at herself for such weakness, she knew that to be Allan Graham's wife she would gladly sacrifice far more brilliant prospects, and she knew that he was free. What, then, was to be her next step? She refused to believe that her husband could long withstand the effects of the life he was leading. It was many months now since she had contrived that he should be seen by a physician, who gave it as his unhesitating opinion that his constitution was already ruined.

(The doctor, as he pocketed his fee, took a sympathising farewell of the beautiful actress, and always spoke feelingly after-

wards of her distress at her husband's condition.)

Should she write to Allan Graham and condole with him on his bereavement, not too recent a one now—the paper was several weeks old in which she had seen the notice. After long reflection Fanny decided to make no move at present, lest she should blunder in doing so, but she informed Mrs. Brown that she would probably require her to attend her to St. Magus in the early spring, and satisfied with this conclusion she retired to rest in the small inner room that was always kept ready for her use.

What she proposed to gain by this plan she hardly knew. But it would quiet her restlessness, would enable her to learn something of Allan's mode of life, and

there was besides a chance that she might meet him. No one could say she had sought him out if she stayed twenty miles off in the county town. But no doubt he was often there, and who could tell what might happen ?

Spring, therefore, saw her settled in modest lodgings at St. Magus, under the name of Mrs. Martin.

She then found that she was suffering from a bilious attack, and this of course entailed an acquaintance with the doctor, a chatty personage, by no means averse to a long conversation with a patient whose appearance and talk were so new and delightful.

By this simple method Mrs. Martin easily discovered all she wanted, that the family at Invermoy lived in the utmost

retirement since Mrs. Graham's death, that the Laird, though attentive to all his duties in the county and on his own estate, shunned society, while his sister-in-law devoted herself to the children.

"His sister-in-law!" exclaimed Mrs. Martin so suddenly that the doctor looked quite startled. "Pray tell me who she is," continued the lady, cleverly covering her blunder. "Isn't she English?"

"Yes, she is the widow of the last Graham of Invermoy, poor young man,—though, by-the-by, he was far less popular than the present Laird,—and her name was Barton."

"To be sure, she must be a connection of some people I used to know. She is very handsome, is she not?"

"Very, and a charming woman besides,"

replied the doctor, sure that he was saying quite the right thing. "Her conversation, I have heard, is quite delightful. She has lived so much abroad, and we country folk are dull in comparison. I believe the county families greatly regret that she does not go more into society."

"Indeed! It must be a great comfort to Mr. Graham to have such a companion."

"Oh, the very greatest; in fact, with so good a head for his house, I imagine he will never marry again; he was so very devoted to his late wife."

"Ah! Do you know, Doctor Storrar, I think I must go and lie down, my walk has fatigued me," said Mrs. Martin, rising abruptly, and with many expressions of condolence the doctor took his leave.

When he was gone, Mrs. Jutsom's reflections were anything but pleasant. She had persisted in imagining that Graham was leading a solitary life in a more or less ill-regulated household, where the advisability of choosing a fresh mistress would naturally present itself. To find that, so far as the world knew, he was very comfortable, and enjoying the society of that handsome, haughty-looking woman, whom she perfectly well remembered seeing, was distinctly disagreeable. She stayed on, nevertheless, till after two Board meetings, at which she ascertained that many of the county gentlemen would be present, but she saw nothing of Allan Graham's tall figure, though he passed twice along a narrow street not two hundred yards off,



on his way to and from the inn where his horses were put up.

If life in Bloomsbury was dull, life in St. Magus was unbearably stupid, and having found out all that she expected and more than she wished, she informed her friend the doctor that she was greatly benefited by his treatment, and felt herself quite able to resume the journey to England that had been delayed by her indisposition. She listened to his regrets at her departure with her usual suavity, and the instant he was gone, packed up her possessions, hurrying poor old Mrs. Brown through her preparations with irritable restlessness, and was off by coach to Edinburgh, and thence to London.

Arrived there, she went at once to Fisher Street, somewhat anxious as to her hus-

band's movements, since she had never before taken Mrs. Brown away from his neighbourhood.

Her arrangements were carefully made. Carter knew that the receipt of certain sums depended on Jutsom's well-being and apparent satisfaction whenever Mrs. Jutsom should pay one of her uncertain visits, or her emissary, Mrs. Brown, should see fit to call. Mrs. Brown knew that her home would be forfeited the moment she played her mistress false, and though Fanny paid her rent and bought her comforts she wanted, she never gave her money enough to make her in any way independent. Mrs. Jutsom had therefore good reason to suppose that her orders were obeyed to the letter, and that those who received them would be careful not to

kill the goose that laid the golden eggs.

Everything seemed to be as usual when she reached the opium-house, and she gave both Carter and her husband a larger sum than usual in consideration of her previous absence.

Next day a rumour got abroad in Fisher Street that there was gold in Carter's place. Jutsom the opium-eater had paid for a bottle of brandy with a ten-shilling piece, so the door was watched, and when next the wretched man came out, he was struck down and dragged into a dark angle behind the stair.

There, an hour or two later, Carter found him dead, and a messenger went off at once to Mrs. Brown. She, in her turn, sent for Mrs. Jutsom, and the two women went down and claimed the body.

Fanny summoned the police, who as yet had little power in these wild regions, and could, of course, discover nothing, as the thief was too wise to display his gold at once. Still their coming served her purpose, since they were witnesses to the fact that the murdered man was claimed and buried by her as her husband—buried quietly, in an obscure churchyard, so that his death need not be proclaimed to her acquaintances until she was certain that it suited her to make it known. She always acted cautiously, and it did not occur to her that she could ever get herself into difficulties by doing so.

It was well known in Mrs. Jutsom's own circle that she had amassed a pleasant little fortune, though, as usual, opinions varied as to its amount, some crediting

her with enormous wealth—"for you know she was always said to be as stingy as a miser,"—others wondering how she lived, and where the money came from—"for her husband has always been *so* extravagant." There was no needless display in anything she did, and her lodgings were in a quiet street, not too fashionable for moderate purses. Her dinners, though sufficiently good, were no longer as expensive, as in the old days in Somers Street, and though she never seemed to hesitate to do anything she wished, she never wasted money needlessly.

A few weeks after her return from Scotland, however, she protested once or twice that she could not go to some great *fête* for want of a dress that she really couldn't afford to provide. Then came

vague hints about losses, allusions to the extravagances of which men are guilty, fewer gatherings at her house, a little air of anxiety, occasional sighs.

Thus judiciously prepared, the world was not surprised to learn that the beautiful actress was going abroad to economise—she could not say where—perhaps to some French country town, perhaps to Italy.

It was only when the notice of apartments to let had appeared in the windows that her friends discovered that no one of them knew where she really had gone.

One or two looked at each other and wondered whether she had gone alone, but this scandalous suggestion was not well received, the majority being inclined to think that it was to escape from her hus-

band that she had left so secretly, and that probably she had paid his debts again, thus showing that some women can command the good opinion of their sex, or else that even women can stand by each other when there is a man to be blamed.

Mistress Fanny had gone neither to France nor to Italy, but to Bull Lane. Now that she was a free woman she had read over carefully a faded letter that had always remained in the secret drawer of her desk, and had determined that she would claim the execution of the promise it contained, notwithstanding that she was uncertain of her ground, knew that the Laird of Invermoy must be extremely unlike the trustful boy whose devotion had so charmed her, and that in all probability

he might seek to repudiate her hold over him altogether.

On the other hand, she recollected how scrupulously he had always kept the most trifling promise he had ever made her, and in fine, she had great faith in her own attractions and power of persistence.

She had decided on returning to Bull Lane for two reasons; in the first place, she wished to conceal her husband's death from her friends in Bloomsbury, as she had hitherto made great capital of her matrimonial troubles, and in the event of her present scheme failing might wish to do so again.

It was thus obviously necessary that Mr. Graham, if he came to town, should not encounter any of the Bloomsbury circle.



It would be time enough if he were coming, and she wished to meet him there, to announce her widowhood. A little arrangement of dates was easily managed.

Secondly, she remembered that one of the salient features of Allan's character had been complete indifference to wealth among his friends and ready generosity towards those poorer than himself. She judged, and rightly, that Mrs. Jutsom comfortably established in apartments and in need of nothing would appeal to him less successfully than the same lady living in poverty and seclusion in Bull Lane, and pathetically conscious of her own helplessness. Having thus thoroughly studied her part, she sat down with considerable seriousness to take the first step towards the achievement of her desire.

Several sheets of paper were destroyed before she had completed a letter to her mind, and she locked it away unsealed for perusal next day, well aware that a midnight production often looks very different in the sober light of morning.

She read it once as soon as she was up, once again after her comfortable little breakfast, then, having first copied it carefully, it was sealed and dispatched.

She reckoned the days till the reply could come, and with her usual lightheartedness amused herself in the interval as though no such questions were hanging in the balance, puzzling even Mrs. Brown both by her wild talk and her determination to see something of what she mockingly called the society of Bull Lane.

On the morning when her answer could

arrive, she hurried off to the post-office to which she had told Allan to write, having decided to give no address till she should learn something of his state of mind.

No letter was there, and for three days she haunted the office in a state of angry expectation.

Before she receives Allan's letter, we will glance at the contents of her own.

The post-bag is delivered at Invermoy in the middle of the day, and as the Laird is usually out, his sister-in-law opens it and lays his share in the library.

That is a woman's hand, and the paper is scented. Who can Allan be hearing from in London, she wonders, as she places three letters on his writing-table, and then returns to the drawing-room to read one of Concha's gracefully worded epistles.

The room is greatly improved since we saw it first, though still very unlike what modern ideas have taught us to approve. The old furniture is still there, but near one window is a heavy sofa, with back so broad that one imagines it is intended to form another seat, and a piano occupies the place of the old spinnet. Certain Indian embroideries and ornaments relieve the sombre hues of the old velvet chairs, and altogether the room has a pleasantly habitable air.

One corner is given up to the children, whose toys fill an oak cabinet. There the window-curtains are alternately houses in which Elspeth and Ian play at domestic life, or more frequently caves in which the lady hides, while the knight rides forth to battle, and little Allister gets many a

tumble in emulating him. They remember very little of their mother, for Aunt Ellen has never allowed them to feel the want of her care.

When Allan came in, he too remarked Fanny's fine slanting writing, and great was his surprise as he glanced at the signature.

"Fanny Jutsom! What can she have to say to me?" thought he, as he turned his chair to the failing light and read as follows:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"How many years is it since I have addressed you by that name, and what a variety of events have befallen us both since those days when we were so much to each other! How much I never

knew till you were gone and I was alone. I heard of your marriage, but did not know of your sad bereavement till months after it took place, or I should have written to condole with you. I would not then re-open wounds that I trust time has healed. I too am free, my husband is dead, and you know in part at least how galling was the bondage I endured. You do not know with what increased weight my chain pressed on me latterly. Mr. Jutsom not only drank, but became an opium-eater, and passed his existence in a den in the East-end of London. I longed so with all my heart for freedom to lead a different life that I cannot mourn for him now. I have left the stage, as no doubt you are aware, and wish only for quiet and happiness, if I can attain them. Pray

inform me of your welfare, and believe that all that concerns you is still of the deepest interest to

“Your sincere and true friend,

“FANNY JUTSOM.”

That's a very kind letter, was Allan's first idea ;—what was her motive in writing it, the second.

The more he thought of it the more perplexed he felt, for unless Fanny was greatly altered she was not one to begin a correspondence out of simple friendship. He would have liked to consult Ellen, but the allusions to bygone days prevented him from doing so, and in answer to her inquiries he replied briefly that the letter was from an old town acquaintance.

This was the epistle that in time was delivered into Fanny's impatient hands:—

“DEAR FRIEND,

“I am obliged to you for your kind interest in me, but I have little to tell you. I live as quietly as possible, and my sister-in-law looks after my house and children. I regret to hear that you have undergone so much more trouble during the latter years of your husband's life, and hope that you may now enjoy an existence more to your taste. I saw you perform in Edinburgh, and am sorry that such a pleasure is no longer within reach of the public. No doubt, however, you are satisfied with your present choice, or you would have again returned to the stage, after recovering from your unfortunate accident.



With every good wish, believe me to remain,

“Your obliged friend,

“ALLAN GRAHAM.”

Mrs. Jutsom, in her eagerness, had opened her packet at the door of the post-office, and her self-control barely enabled her to repress all sign of the anger that shook her when she had ended it.

“Is he made of stone? Does he wilfully misunderstand, or is he merely stupid?” she asked herself. “Is it possible he has forgotten? Perhaps he has forgotten the bit of paper I have in such safe keeping! I should like to have attained my end without using that; but if he provokes me he will regret it. And so he was in the house in Edinburgh, and saw me, and yet he

could go away without a word. Well, men are made so, I suppose, but no one shall forget me and not rue it!"

Another letter was quickly despatched to the north, and Allan uttered an exclamation of annoyance at the sight of it.

"DEAR FRIEND,

"Your polite letter reached me later than I had hoped. Part of it surprises me. I confess I had thought that, had you been in Edinburgh, you would have visited me, or at least written to me. You used to be more ready to express any feeling that I was fortunate enough to arouse. You wish me happiness. Is that a mere phrase, or is it as honest as all your words used to be? I treasure some of them still, and may perhaps remind you

of them some day, unless, indeed, you are unchanged, and need no reminder. I beg you to write to me again soon.

“F. JUTSOM.”

To this Allan replied somewhat bluntly, confessing his inability to understand her drift, but renewing his expressions of good will. He had, indeed, no wish to annoy her, but in his busy life had forgotten a good deal, and regarded this correspondence as a mere idle woman's fancy.

Once it crossed his mind that she might be treasuring the foolish farewell words he had written her, but even if she did, what then? He was sitting with Ellen when a third letter was handed to him, and while he read it Elspeth was playing with his watch-ribbon and seals. He put the child

off his knee without a word, and left the room, walking slowly, like a man in a dream. Ellen sent the little ones upstairs to their governess as soon as she could, and listened anxiously, till, to her great relief, she heard him calling her.

"Sit down, Ellen," said he, closing the library door, "and help me with your clear sense, for I am dazed. Listen first, and learn what a fool I once was," he added, bitterly; and then told her, in curt phrases, the history of his acquaintance with Mrs. Jutsom. When he had finished, he laid the three letters on the table. This was the gist of the third:

"You cannot or will not understand me. You compel me to speak plainly. Have you entirely forgotten the last evening we spent together—the last letters we ex-

changed? Have you forgotten the question I asked you and the fervour of your reply? If you are so altered, I am sorry for both our sakes, for we are both free, and I hold your written promise of marriage. You were a man of your word when I knew you—perhaps in that also you are changed.”

When she had finished reading, Ellen held out her hands to her brother.

“My poor Allan, what a dreadful woman she must be! I am sorry for you. I suppose you will decline any further correspondence. That will be the easiest way.”

“You think so,—you don’t know Fanny Jutsom,” said Allan, harshly, for certain recollections were presenting themselves to him under new aspects. “If she has

made up her mind to do it, she is capable of publishing that letter of mine in every paper in the kingdom."

"That would be extremely unpleasant, certainly; but people would know how young you were then, and it would be treated as a boyish folly. She would be the most blamed."

"And how about the fact of the promise itself?"

"It is a pity, of course, but evidently you cannot help that."

Allan walked up and down the room for a few minutes, and then stopped before the arm-chair.

"I never broke my word in my life, and on my honour I do not see how I am to do it now!"

"Allan!" cried Ellen, springing to her

feet and gazing at him, "are you mad? You would marry that—that woman—put her in the place of my Agnes—set her over her children! Oh, it is monstrous—impossible!"

"I never broke my word in my life," repeated Allan.

"Then do it now if you have any sense left! When so much is at stake, what does your word matter? The promise of a boy, claimed by a woman who can have no heart, and probably has no reputation!"

"Well, well. I am not going to do anything to-night. Calm yourself, and let us think it over quietly; and, my dear, begin by believing that I want to do the right thing," said Allan, sadly.

Dinner was a melancholy meal that even-

ing; Ellen's mind was full of fear and indignation, and she was already speculating how far she could, if allowed, take sole charge of the nephews and niece whom she would not for worlds see contaminated by evil influences.

As for Allan, his first impulse of anger having passed off, he could only think over the subject under its different aspects and find each one more embarrassing than the last.

Before his marriage he had destroyed Fanny's original letter, and now vainly endeavoured to recall its precise contents. Had there been a snare in it from the beginning? If so, why then, anger flamed up again, and he wished he had been dealing with a man. But he did not—could not believe in such cold-blooded specula-



tion on a possible chance. Remembering that farewell, he believed that Fanny really loved him then.

He pitied her heartily, but shrank almost as much as Ellen herself from bringing such a woman into the same house with his children. He knew that she stood higher with the world than his indignant sister-in-law supposed, yet it shocked him to think of his open-eyed Elspeth making friends with the queen of a Somers Street supper-party. But then that fatal promise—he recollected with a sudden pang how he had sealed the letter with the seal he now wore, and “*I hauld faith*” seemed to ring in his ears.

His name and his word—these were the two things he had cared most for in his whole life—the honour of the one, and the

integrity of the other being his to cherish independently of external circumstances, and, as he fondly imagined, never to be impeached.

And now both were in danger, and, turn which way he would, he saw no escape. If he kept his word, his name must suffer discredit; if he escaped a *mésalliance*, his word was disregarded.

Ellen broke a long silence with a suggestion.

"Allan, do you know exactly what you said to Mrs. Jutsom?"

"I have not the smallest idea."

"Then ask to see the letter; she may be pretending there is more in it than is the case."

"I have thought of that and shall ask her for it, or for a copy; I don't suppose

she would trust it out of her hands."

"Ah, if I saw it, I think I should be tempted to burn it."

"Then I should be doubly compelled to marry Mrs. Jutsom," replied Allan, coldly.

"But you do not mean that, I know. I have been a fool, but I need not be a scoundrel. The question is how to pay for my folly with the least suffering to others."

"You are right, and I was wrong," said Ellen. "Whatever you do, let me help you in any way I can."

"You shall, Ellen; and remember, whatever conclusion I may come to—if I am compelled to do this thing, and my home must be destroyed—I look to you to save the children from harm."

In due time Allan received a copy of his

letter, but no comfort was to be got from it. There was no doubt about the promise. If ever she was free, he would gladly hasten to make her his wife; he even prayed that that time might come.

Fanny had thought of altering a word or two in the copy, but on reflection concluded that the sentences were emphatic enough as they stood, and though she would lie freely, if necessary, she was wise enough not to risk anything by needless falsehood.

Allan's next step was to write her a quiet letter, reasoning with her on the probable results if he were to keep his pledge.

He reminded her how many years had elapsed, and pointed out that they knew nothing of each other now, and were un-

like in tastes and interests; he said plainly that nothing would induce him to alter his mode of life, and that he was sure a few months of the monotonous society of the neighbourhood would weary her, even, he added, after much thought, supposing you were received at all, which is doubtful. A promise, he proceeded, might be annulled by mutual consent, and if she would adopt this wisest course, he would then be happy to subscribe himself her sincere friend.

Of affection he said not one word, and the omission stung Fanny to the quick. Never before had she felt such a desire for power, such a wish to subjugate this man, whose letters were courteous, even kindly worded, as was fitting when a gentleman was writing to a woman, but as perfectly unimpassioned as though that

woman had not once been the cynosure of all eyes. Fanny walked to the little mirror and looked at herself earnestly. Yes, she was beautiful still; her complexion had improved since she ceased to "make up" for the stage, her eyes were as brilliant, her hair as rich as formerly. At all hazards she must force Allan Graham to come to town. So she wrote, carefully balancing every word, giving her address in Bull Lane for the first time, and explaining that she had not done so before, as she wished to conceal her extreme poverty from her old friend.

She then went on to say that, in spite of his arguments, she was disposed to claim the fulfilment of his pledge, that she was tired of writing, and that if any arrangement were to be come to, it could only be

by word of mouth. If, therefore, he did not come to her by a certain date, she declared that she would present herself at Invermoy, if she spent her last penny in doing so. "If I am driven to this course, I will come with your letter in my hand and on my tongue; you know that *I* keep my word." This was her concluding threat.

"She will do it!" exclaimed Allan, when he read it, "if I do not go. Let me see, she gives me two days to get ready, that is very kind of her certainly. I remember her face and voice when she and Jutsom quarrelled, and I can quite believe that she never fails to execute what she threatens."

Even Ellen agreed that a scandal of this sort was to be avoided, and on the appointed day saw Allan set out with a heavy heart for London.

"If she is really poor," said he, before he left, "that may explain her persistence; there must be some strong motive to induce her to demand marriage when I have made it so clear that I am completely averse to it. If I can bribe her to destroy that letter, I will do so, if it cost me half my income."

"Do so," replied Ellen; "you know how gladly I will share all I possess with you and the children—that means," she added, with an attempt at a smile, "that I can live on half what you give me now."

Meanwhile careful preparations were made in Bull Lane for the expected visitor. Everything belonging to Fanny—the small tablecloth, a cushion from the arm-chair, the remains of an excellent pie



and a bottle of very fair wine, were removed into the back-room, while she herself put on her oldest gown and locked away all her rings. She found out the hours at which the coaches arrived from the north, and intended to keep watch about the time when she thought Allan might appear. Of his coming she entertained no doubt; for, as she said to herself, he is too proud not to try every resource before he risks exposure at home.

In his impatience to get the matter settled, Graham hurried over breakfast, and when his step was heard on the attic stairs, Mrs. Brown had barely time to conceal herself, as directed, behind the unlatched bed-room door. Never in her life had Fanny acted better than on this occasion. Nothing could have been more perfect than

the mingled pride and reserve of her greeting, her pauses that allowed her to study her companion's face, her intervals of friendliness, no sooner shown than checked, her restrained emotion as she alluded to the past. Allan was helpless in her hands; if he attempted to reason she interrupted him with a thousand reminiscences of her past career, her troubles and regrets; when he spoke of the object of his visit she begged him to defer that topic, and let her enjoy for once the society of an old friend. And during all her talk her beauty recalled to him more powerfully than her words the old fascination. Time and society had matured and increased the charm of her manner, and as he watched her, he felt that he must make an effort to return to business.

"How is it you come to be living here?" he asked, abruptly.

His companion, who observed the change of his tone, felt that she was making more impression than she had anticipated.

"I told you I was poor. Mr. Jutsom all but ruined me."

"You did not use to be so generous to him," said Allan, with a returning suspicion.

"No ; but we all change, as you know, and I thought I ought to help him. Besides, I have been foolish in some ways, not laying by as I should have done, and always intended to do. An old servant of my father's, a faithful old soul, attends to my few wants here. She is the only creature that has never failed me," answered Fanny, looking down with a sigh.

"Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Jutsom. If you will allow me the pleasure of assisting you, I shall be only too happy," replied Allan.

Fanny had turned to him with eagerness that was not altogether feigned, when he began.

"You mean what?" said she.

"I mean that, though not a rich man, I can help you to live in some place more fitting for you than this. An old friend may be allowed to do so much."

Mrs. Jutsom rose indignant, haughty.

"An old friend! You call yourself by that name, and you come here to insult me! Have I asked you for money? Did I not conceal my address from you out of pride? Oh! I could not have believed it of you! You offer me money, and I—I

asked you for love!" Here this injured woman sank down again, covering her face with her hands, as though utterly overcome. Graham rose with a smothered oath, and walked to the fireplace. "You had better leave me, Mr. Graham, and I will write to you at your hotel. You are indeed unlike the Allan that I knew!"

"Not so unlike as you think," cried Graham. "Heaven keep me in my senses," he added to himself. "Listen to me, Fanny, and remember, if I wound you, it is you who forced me to speak. You know as well as I do that that letter you hold contains a promise given by a mere boy, under the influence of a passion that disgraced us both. Hush! it is my turn to speak now, and you must hear me. You know that if you were—if you had—well,

that no honourable woman would make use of it. You know, lastly, that I do not wish to marry at all."

"You do not love me?"

"No," replied Allan, firmly. "Though I admire your beauty, and would willingly help you for the sake of old times, I do not love you. In the teeth of all this will you be so mad, so selfish as to claim that promise, or will you be generous and destroy the letter?"

"Never!" There was not a moment's hesitation, not a particle of compunction on the beautiful face. "I will give it to you as my wedding present after you have made me your wife, not till then."

There was silence for a few seconds, then Graham took up his hat.

"Then there is nothing more to be said.

Hitherto I have acted without advice, now I shall consult a lawyer before I see you again. Husbands and wives sometimes live apart."

He was on the stairs when Mrs. Brown rushed after him and besought him to return, if only for a minute, a word. Her scared face as much as her entreaties brought him back, and hardly was he inside the door when Fanny flung herself on her knees beside him, tears streaming down her cheeks.

In truth she loved him in her wayward fashion, and his behaviour had shown her even in this short interview that he merited far nobler affection than hers. Her brain was in a whirl. She almost hated herself when she saw the gloom on his face, and yet she knew that she could not sacrifice

her hopes. The mention of the lawyer, too, alarmed her, for a separate maintenance would by no means assure her the position she coveted, so she desired Mrs. Brown to hurry after Allan and make him come back.

“He must come; do not let him go,” she cried, as the old woman hastened away.

Now, kneeling before him, clinging to his hand, she sobbed out her regrets, implored his forgiveness, begged him to come back and see her, not to let a stranger interfere, and became so agitated that at last, finding words of no avail, Allan raised her and placed her in an arm-chair.

“It is useless for me to remain now,” he said, gently. “I will come to-morrow at the same hour.”



"Only say good-bye kindly, say you forgive me!"

"Good-bye, then," he said, laying his hand for a moment on her hair. "As for forgiveness, we both need it," and so left her.

The hours that intervened before their next meeting were spent by Graham in wandering about the town. Too pre-occupied to go and see anyone, and too uneasy to remain in the hotel, he walked aimlessly about the parks, cursing his youthful folly, angry at his own indecision, yet unable to decide, and conscious that this woman's beauty was a greater snare than he could have believed possible.

On her part, she carefully recalled every tone and word her victim had uttered, studying his nature as though he had been

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the hero of a play, rehearsing to herself at the same time the further arguments she meant to employ, and calculating her chances of success.

When he arrived, his sunburnt face paler than its wont, she greeted him calmly, and allowed him to restate his views of yesterday without interruption.

“What would you like to do, supposing you accede, as I hope you will, to my proposal and destroy that letter?” asked he, deceived by her tranquillity.

“What should I like to do?” she replied, gazing out of the window as she spoke. “I should give readings, probably, from different plays—or shall I get up private theatricals, or marry an Italian Count—Cipriani admired me enough, and I daresay he is a Count—or some one

else, it would not matter. Which of these things do you advise? You are so generously ready to assist me, you might pay for the playbills, in the first instance, or for the wedding-dress, in the second. Ah! Allan," she cried, leaning towards him with a sudden burst of passion, "how can you be so cruel? However poor I may be, I will never touch one penny of yours. You have humiliated me enough. Can you not be merciful now? I will be so good, so good! I will live as you please—be as quiet, as gentle as the veriest country girl; only give me a little, little love, or if you cannot do it now, let me win it in time!"

It was wonderful pleading. Whether by accident or design, she had placed herself near him in just such a position as on

that other night years ago when they had parted. He remembered it only too well, and she saw that he did so. She laid her hand on his arm ; if she could extort one word from him now, her cause was won, for she knew he would not retract a second pledge.

Graham dared not look in her face, but sat perplexed and silent, and in the pause thrust his other hand deep into his pocket. There his fingers touched a piece of crumpled paper, and mechanically he drew it out. It was a child's copy, and the moment he saw it he remembered bright-haired Elspeth running to meet him as he came home from the farm, that she might give him the day's lesson for which she had been praised. The victory was won, but not by Fanny ; little Elsie had saved

her father. Springing up and grasping the soiled sheet firmly, he exclaimed—

“Mrs. Jutsom, it cannot be! Forgive me for any pain I cause you. I regret it heartily. I would help you if you would let me, be your friend, if you will, but marry you I will not.”

“Whose letter is that?—some other woman’s—your sister-in-law’s, perhaps,” said Fanny, not yet moving a muscle.

Graham opened the paper and held it up.

“You see, you are very beautiful, but—I am that child’s father.”

“Elspeth Graham!” repeated Fanny, looking at the large signature—“Elspeth Graham! And so she defeats me! She shall not—I swear she shall not!” she cried, rising and confronting him.

"You can be so tender to her, and you are iron to me. Well, then, you shall find me iron too; you shall curse the day you refused to listen to me. I will force you to keep your word, or I will make every town in the kingdom ring with my story. Ah! I could act still, and make the people feel that every word of scorn I hurl at a villain is hurled at you, Allan Graham. You love your name, I remember—through your name I'll punish you!"

Before this storm Allan fled, and this time Fanny made no effort to stop him. Anger possessed her—an anger embittered by a fleeting glimpse of a happiness out of her reach; for even in the shock of failure she had observed the softening of Allan's grave face as he read the childish footnote, "*For my dear papa.*"

took an interest in you myself, and agreed with his view."

"And that was that the sooner I got away from Miss Delancey the better, was it not?"

"Exactly so. Did you know that at the time?"

"He had spoken to me in a general way, but it did not occur to me till long after, that he had probably discovered my folly and was trying to save me. She is the woman."

"She! But her husband is alive!"

"No, he isn't, at least she says not, and I think she must be telling the truth."

"H'm—well, it is possible. But if he is dead, why should she have kept it secret?"

"How do you know that she has?"

"I know a lady at whose house she has

visited a good deal, a Mrs. Mowbray—they profess to be great friends, and I am certain she is not aware that Jutsom is dead. But, then, women do not always tell their great friends everything,” said Mr. Dalglish, with a smile.

“Mrs. Jutsom was received in good society then,” asked Allan.

“Oh! yes, she has managed wonderfully well for herself; she has as good a reputation as half the great ladies in London, and is a model of discretion, in fact. But what claim has she on you?”

“She has a mad letter I wrote her in answer to one of hers,” said Allan, going on to explain what had occurred.

“I always thought that woman was a humbug,” said Mr. Dalglish, quietly, when his friend had finished. “But what a



clever one she is ! Why, I have heard her spoken of as a perfect pattern, devoted to her art, and all the rest of it, and she has been hoarding that letter all these years. I wonder if she has got any more of the same sort ! It is damnable ! But now what is to be done ? Of course you can't marry her ?"

"The difficulty is that I have undoubtedly given that promise."

"But, good heavens ! you are not thinking of keeping it ?"

"I want to do the right thing ; have I the right to break it ?"

"You have certainly no right to keep it, and set her over your children. Suppose you made a promise over your wine to pick my pocket or break open my cash-box,

you would not keep it when you were sober."

"But this was not given over my wine, you see."

"You were as much off your head as if it had been, I suspect," said Mr. Dalglish, significantly.

"And even if it had been, some men do keep pledges made in that way. My cousin Allan did so, and lost money heavily in consequence. He was not half himself when he undertook to risk anything in the St. Magus flax-mills."

"I remember, I remember; he was a fine fellow, poor Allan, and never broke faith in his life."

"Yet you are trying to persuade me to do so; that is hardly fair, I think."

“My dear boy, this is different. Your cousin only damaged his purse, you would damage your children’s comfort, perhaps their whole future, for nothing would make me trust that woman. She is too beautiful; upon my honour, I think the devil gets a larger share somehow of a witch like that than he does of a good every-day woman. No, no, you must not marry her, and as to the exposure, if I were you I would let her do her worst; she will bring far more discredit on herself than she will on you,” said Mr. Dalglish, who was less anxious about the opinion of others, than Allan.

“The exposure might be only a just punishment for my sin,” replied Allan, gloomily; “but it seems to me that is evading the question of whether I can

break my word. What I hoped was, that a clever lawyer might bribe her to agree at the worst to an immediate separation after marriage, or make her destroy that letter, and so release me. She liked money always, and it must be of importance to her in her present state of destitution."

"State of destitution! what are you talking about?"

"Did you not know? Jutsom ruined her, or she was extravagant, or both. She has been living for months in a wretched attic away in the East-end of London. Bull Lane the street is called."

"And she has a comfortable balance at Child's! Why, it is a lie! The woman is taking you in; not two months ago she was giving parties in Hanover Street, and I met her banker, an old

friend of mine, going to one of them ! ”

“ Is it possible ; can you prove it ? ”

“ Of course I can ; at least I can prove the parties easily enough, and as to the money, she must have done something very rash if it is all gone since then.”

“ Then I’m free, and she may do her worst in spite of my promise, for I will never bind myself to a liar. Thank God ! ” cried Allan, covering his face with his hands. “ I shall go back to my bairns with a clear conscience.”

“ To be sure you will, and when I go to Pitmaldie I will come and see them. What o’clock is it ? Just one ; then let us have a glass of Madeira and a bit of rump steak, and then we can settle our plan of action.”

In order to satisfy Allan, it was only necessary to discover that Mrs. Jutson

was still in possession of some fortune, and this much Mr. Dalglish undertook to find out from his friend the banker.

Leaving Graham to await his return at the hotel, he called upon Mr. Child and reminded him of a certain evening when they had met in Bloomsbury, and the latter had said that he was going to a party at Mrs. Jutsom's. "I am a useful person to show there," he had added—"it looks well for a lady to be on friendly terms with her banker."

"I remember it perfectly," replied Mr. Child.

"Then will you answer one or two questions as between friends? You know I am not likely to ask them without some good reason. Does Mrs. Jutsom still bank with you?"

"I must ask you why you wish to know. I cannot answer questions without some idea of their drift."

"Would she be a safe person with whom to transact business, then?"

"Certainly. There can be no harm in my telling you that, as you are aware."

"To what extent? Is she safe for a few hundreds, or thousands?"

"Nearer the latter than the former," replied the banker, smiling. "I should be very well satisfied to take her security for a pretty large sum."

"I thought so! yet she is, at this moment, representing herself to a friend of mine as in a state of the utmost poverty. It is downright robbery!"

"If she is accepting help, she is certainly obtaining money under false pre-

tences ; but surely she cannot be so utterly without a conscience !”

“H’m ! I do not think there is much of that about her. However, do not repeat what I have told you—at least, in the meantime. You have done more good than you know by giving me that information,” said Mr. Dalglish, shaking hands and leaving the astonished banker to wonder over the eccentricities of which women are capable.

“It is all right, Allan,” said his friend, entering the coffee-room ; “and now I think the best thing we can do, is to go at once together to Bull Lane.”

“Very well. Will she know you ?”

“I think she will probably remember meeting me at Mrs. Mowbray’s,” said Mr. Dalglish, with rather a grim smile.



In truth, Mrs. Jutsom, knowing him to be a friend of Allan's, had tried to be agreeable to him at a party there, while he, recollecting how nearly she had ruined the boy, repelled her advances with satirical politeness.

Fanny did not expect visitors in Bull Lane that afternoon, and was refreshing herself with a very pleasant little dinner, brought by poor Mrs. Brown from an eating-house at a considerable distance. The dishes were still on the table; she was leisurely finishing some apricots, and the Château Margot stood beside her, when the two gentlemen, who had come up quietly, knocked at the door. Mrs. Brown opened it cautiously, but seeing Allan, concluded all was right, and ushered them in. One look at the rigid and

ghastly expression of her mistress's face was enough, and when a gesture dismissed her, she wrung her hands and shut herself up in the inner room in absolute fear.

"To what do I owe this very unexpected pleasure?" asked Mrs. Jutsom as steadily as she could.

"To our conversation this morning," replied Allan. "I consulted my friend Mr. Dalglish after leaving you, and he has thrown a good deal of light on the matter."

"You and I have met before, Mrs. Jutsom, at Mrs. Mowbray's," said Mr. Dalglish; "none of your friends are aware, I believe, that you are a widow."

"Ah—you are quite right, sir, I had my own reasons for concealing the fact."

"No doubt, madam, and likewise for

concealing the fact that Mr. Child is your banker."

Fanny lent back with tolerable composure, but she knew that she had lost the game.

"Go on, gentlemen, perhaps you will explain your object in time."

"Simply this, Mrs. Jutsom," interposed Allan, decidedly, "you have deliberately deceived me without even any cause that I can see. For aught I know your husband may be alive."

"I can prove his death, I can bring witnesses," she said, looking up eagerly.

"I am glad to hear you have spoken one truth at least, but you cannot clear yourself further. I know that you are comfortably off, perhaps rich,"

"Mr. Child shall rue this—"

"Pardon my interrupting you," said Mr. Dalglish, "he has said nothing but what every banker would have been justified in saying. You forget that there was ample presumptive evidence that you are here by choice."

Fanny turned her head impatiently, and Allan continued.

"After this discovery, no power on earth would induce me to keep my promise to you. You may do what you choose with that letter, but you will not alter my decision."

"Again pardon," said Mr. Dalglish, as Fanny was about to speak, "I think Mr. Graham has hardly stated his case completely enough; allow me to do it, Allan. We offer you two alternatives, Mrs. Jutsom, one of which you must accept this after-

noon. If you will in our presence destroy Mr. Graham's letter, both he and I will undertake to be silent as to what has passed, and you can then return to society when it pleases you. If you refuse to agree to this he will be prepared to foil any attack you may make on him by a statement of the whole truth, and it is not too much to say that I can close every door in your old neighbourhood against you. I need not tell so experienced a lady how easy it is to spread a story, especially if it is rather an uncommon one."

Fanny glanced from one to the other of the grave faces before her, and saw no sign of relenting on either. Her schemes, her expectations seemed now as unreal, as mad as any dream. How could she have

hoped to melt that stern countenance, to win that man's love? She grew afraid as she looked at her judges, and thought that her best chance lay in complete surrender. Therefore, when Mr. Dalgleish said, coldly,

"What is your answer, madam?" she replied piteously, her dry lips trembling as she spoke,

"You have won; men always do; and when a woman has lost, it does not seem to them a great thing. You know I am in your power; what could I do, if you were really as cruel as you say? It would be unmanly. Surely you, a gentleman, would not treat me so hardly."

"That is in your own hands to decide. I have told you the condition on which I will keep your secret."

Silence for a few seconds, during which the grey eyes remained fixed on Dalgleish's face as though Fanny knew that here was in reality the arbiter of her fate, a man beyond the reach of her arts, practical and cold as marble. Her scrutiny decided her, and she rose slowly, all her pride of movement gone.

"I will get the letter," she said, "it is in the next room."

"Bravo! I did not expect to settle it all so quickly," said Dalgleish, when they were alone.

"Poor soul! I wish to heaven I could have spared her this," replied Allan, uneasily.

"Tut, man, she has got her deserts—she will do well enough, never fear."

Some minutes elapsed before Fanny re-

turned, and going up to Allan, laid the letter in his hands.

In spite of the experience of the last two days, he winced as he saw the faded lines that he had written with so full a heart, such trembling fingers.

“Ah!” exclaimed Fanny, “I am glad you can feel a little, when you see your own words. Listen, Allan Graham. I loved you when you wrote that, and I have never forgotten you. If I lied, it was because I thought—oh, it does not matter what I thought—but I did it to win you. And now I have more than lost you, for you must hate me.”

“Shall we destroy that letter,” said Mr. Dalgleish, calmly, thinking Allan had heard quite enough.

“I will do it, not you—don’t you touch



it," said Fanny, sharply, and taking the paper from Allan, she dropped it into the fire, and watched it burn in silence.

"Now let us go," said Dalgleish, taking Allan by the arm.

Then, at last, the woman was too strong for the actress, and Fanny Jutsom threw herself into a chair, with a bitter cry.

"Oh, what a fool—what a fool I have been all these years!"

Graham shook off his friend's detaining hand and crossed the room.

"Fanny, for God's sake don't fret over a wretched mistake! I could not have made you happy, and if you had succeeded in deceiving me, think how awful it would have been for both of us when I found you out—too late."

"If you think I am punished enough, say you forgive me," sobbed she.

"With all my heart. Shake hands now, and let us part friends."

Fanny took the proffered hand in both hers, and pressed it to her lips, and in another moment the door closed, and she was alone.

"Upon my honour, Allan, it is as well I was here to look after you, or you would have married her in spite of everything," said Dalgleish.

"I loved her once," replied Allan, curtly, and his tone warned his companion to make no further allusion to what had passed.

Many days elapsed before Mrs. Jutsom recovered her equanimity sufficiently to

leave the retirement of Bull Lane. She had been thoroughly shaken by the sudden extinction of her hopes, and the sense of defeat that overwhelmed her. It seemed to her now that she had to reconstruct her life, and that she was not equal to the effort. Resisting Mrs. Brown's entreaties, she lay on her bed for hours, too listless to move or speak. Very soon, however, her natural elasticity of frame re-asserted itself, and when the old nurse found her standing before the glass, and beginning to comb out her long hair, she nodded her head sagaciously, and knew that "Miss Fanny" was herself again. It was in the discreetest widow's weeds that she returned to Bloomsbury, and the shuddering horror with which she implored her friends not to question her about the last few weeks, con-

firmed them in the belief that her husband had caused her great tribulation, and that she deserved their best sympathies.

Mr. Dalgleish did not greatly affect the Bloomsbury circle, but having heard of Mrs. Jutsom's fresh *début*, curiosity led him to accept an invitation to an evening party at Mrs. Mowbray's, where she was pretty sure to be. When he reached the inner rooms he saw her talking, in her serenest mood, to a tall, sallow-faced Italian. Perhaps it was the heat that made her suddenly turn pale, and grasping that gentleman's arm, beg him to lead her to the door.

Placing her in a seat, with a face of the deepest concern, "I run to fetch the cool water—the ice," he said.

Directly he was gone she turned to Mr. Dalgleish.

"You will not betray me, you will be merciful," she gasped.

"You have my word, and at my age a man makes no promise he cannot keep. I wish you success and happiness, madam," returned he, and passed on into the crowd. He thought afterwards that his reply had been almost cruel, but consoled himself with the reflection that a scheming woman seldom gets her deserts, and that the Italian would comfort this one for any momentary stab he had given her.

Shortly afterwards he received a newspaper, addressed in a fine slanting hand, which contained an announcement of the marriage of Mrs. Jutsom to Il Conte Niccolò Giuseppe Dei Cipriani.

"A better mate for her than quiet Allan Graham," said Mr. Dalgleish to himself,

and forthwith sat down to write a letter of congratulation to his friend at Invermoy.

In spite of his boast, he did not keep one promise that he had made, for he never revisited the beloved glen of Pitmaldie, that had been so long the paradise of his dreams. Nor did he make acquaintance with a third generation of Grahams, but stayed on in London, his hale, temperate nature making the years, as they rolled over him, touch him but lightly. He lived to see the beginning of the reign of steam, taking his first railway journey with a sedate curiosity not unmingled with fear, and uttering his favourite exclamation of "Bless my soul alive!" when he heard that a line was begun between Edinburgh and her ports of Leith and Granton. But when the two

first steamers to New York made their successful trip, his customary contentment was sorely disturbed.

“ If I were seventeen instead of seventy, I would be the greatest merchant of the day,” cried he, and it was some time before he could listen quite good-humouredly to the hopes of the younger men before whom new worlds were opening. They elbowed him a little, this pushing, hurrying generation of youngsters, but even while they did so, they were compelled to admit, in the new slang that he abhorred, that he was “ a regular trump—one that would always back a fellow that he knew.” An estimate in which his contemporaries would have readily agreed.

## CHAPTER IV.

## HOME.

ALLAN GRAHAM, as he journeyed quietly homewards, had time for a good many reflections on his experience during the past week, and re-entered his own doors a humbler man than when he quitted them.

Little Elsie was surprised at the heartiness of her father's caresses, for though a kind he was not a demonstrative parent, and when she asked what he had been doing, even restless Ian was subdued by the earnestness of his reply.



“I have been seeing a deal of trouble, bairns, and the lesson I have brought back for you is this, that the man who will not confess a blunder for fear of consequences is a coward.”

This was the key-note of his present frame of mind, and though no one save his sister-in-law knew what had taken him to town, or thought of connecting his trip there with any change in him, many remarked that he was less stern a master and more tolerant a friend than heretofore.

The difference showed itself most plainly when a request was made that he would let, or “feu,” as it is called in Scotland, a piece of ground on which to build an English church. One or two county seats had changed owners, and the new

generation were not of the ancient faith; the village of Invermoy too was growing, and Bright was no longer alone in his creed. Mr. McRorie himself had learnt to moderate his rancour. Trying by the exercise of charity now to atone for the bitterness of spirit he had cherished when his wife was alive, Allan did even more than he was asked, for he agreed to give the land free of feu-duty, and begged that he might be allowed to present an organ to the chapel in memory of his wife. He had at first intended to offer a sum of money, to be spent as the promoters of the church chose, and it was Ellen who suggested the change, for, as she said, "Sweet music would be a fitting memorial of Agnes' gentle life." Organists are not easy to

find, and in the end it was she herself who took the office, and poured out her heart in the voluntaries.

Miss Mary's cottage was fitted up for the new clergyman, and as he was a man of clear brain and kind heart, he made his way with people of all classes. He and the minister did not meet for some weeks, but Allan having invited them both to a gathering at Invermoy they fell to talking of the previous owner of the cottage.

The recollection of that peaceful death always softened Mr. McRorie's brusque manner, and his account of the old lady interested the clergyman, and led to further conversation. By accident or design on the part of the latter, they left about the same time, and almost perforce walked back to the village together.

"Come and see what the old house looks like now," said the Englishman, as they reached the cottage door.

"Well, I don't mind if I do. I have not been here for years," returned Mr. McRorie, and they went in.

I have reason to think that this was the first of many pleasant meetings which were not only agreeable in themselves, but did more than volumes of sermons to promote peace and goodwill in one little corner of the earth.

The building of the chapel made an era in the village chronicles, and the next great event that took place was the return of James Dewar. There were a few discordancies and jealousies in connection with the first, but not a single dissentient voice was heard on the subject of the

second. It was true James was a native of Balmawhustle, but Invermoy claimed him as her own, and the whole village appeared to be beside itself on the day of his arrival. The latest inhabitants, who did not know him, were quite at a discount, and were driven to ask humbly for particulars respecting the great man of the day. The best rooms in the inn had been got ready for him, and as everybody knew he was enormously rich, it was likely that he would have every possible opportunity given him of parting with his money.

It was supposed by some that he would come in a chaise and four, but these hardly did justice to his common sense. He arrived as he had left, by the coach; but the well-clad, broad-chested man who got

down, tipping the guard for seeing to sundry portmanteaus and wraps, was very unlike the somewhat lanky lad who had gone away with his luggage in a bundle.

So great was the change that a white-haired woman, who had come from Balmawhustle the day before, stood on the threshold of the inn, scanning the coach with anxious eyes, and did not discover that this well-dressed traveller was the son she sought till he seized her hands, exclaiming mirthfully—

“Eh! mither, do ye no ken yer ain bairn?”

The point of difference, however, that struck the other gazers, and elicited a murmur of surprise that grew into laughter, was that the new-comer wore a beard, a thing then unknown.

“Saw ye ever the like?” “Is it to keep the cauld oot?” cried some. But the crowning criticism was uttered by an old Highlander, who remarked gravely, “Tat is not in the right place. Te shentlemans should not wear her sporran at her chin!”

Nowhere was Dewar more heartily welcomed than at Invermoy, nor did he think Mrs. Graham haughty now, as she sat listening to his graphic descriptions of Australian life.

Though there are many permanent distinctions between the Scotch and English nations, there is one point of complete union; in either country congratulation or triumph finds but one mode of expression—a dinner. That a dinner must be given to James Dewar was so obvious that, before he set foot in Invermoy, a commit-

tee was formed whose only difficulty was to limit the guests so that there should be sitting-room for all in the largest parlour of the inn, the dining-hall, which was afterwards the boast of the village, not being built at the period of which we are writing. Finally, it was agreed that the company should divide for the actual dinner, which might be called the serious part of the proceedings, while for the lighter portion, the toasts and speeches, all should muster in one room. Kate Macrae, on behalf of the womenkind, begged the Laird to have the windows open, so that those who chose to stand in the street might hear, and this he faithfully promised should be done.

Behold the party then assembled, comfortably satisfied with the roast beef and



gooseberry dumplings that are gone, and full of expectation as to the fun and whisky that are about to begin. The Laird occupies the chair, the guest of the evening on his right hand, and Mr. Spait on his left, at whom James Dewar still looks curiously, remembering the awe he once inspired, an awe which makes his present friendliness pleasant even to the successful man. Old Mrs. Dewar is accommodated with a chair near at hand, and gazes at the whole scene with pride that trembles between smiles and tears, as she thinks that this grand feast is in honour of her son, whom all Balmawhustle, and Invermoy too, must admire, and anon wishes that her gudeman Robert had been alive to share her joy.

Mr. McRorie and the English clergy-

man smile at each other across the table. Mr. McHaffie is a jovial croupier, supported by two of the Invermoy tenants, while Gillanders the grieve murmurs to another wondrous tales of the Australian sheep farms, and Bright hob-nobs with a customer in a corner. The windows are wide open, and there Kate's "mutch" and Mrs. Murdoch's ruddy face rise conspicuous above the heads of children whose shrill voices prolong the deeper cheers. The usual loyal toasts were drunk with rapidity, as preliminaries meriting just so much attention as is proper in a respectable and as yet conservative community. Years after, at a meeting in the new hall, a shoemaker, who had read Paine, proposed their abolition, on the ground that they tended to encourage a slavish habit of mind, but

such evidences of progress were as yet undreamt of in Invermoy.

There was a general movement and hum of expectancy when the Laird stood up to propose the toast of the evening.

He was seen at his best on occasions like the present, for his hearty sympathy with the people round him, and his keen interest in all topics that concerned the general welfare, brightened his usual gravity, and if no one expected to be amused by him, all knew, as they looked at his earnest face, and heard his deep, well-modulated voice, that sound sense and simple language were sure to be forthcoming. We need not listen to his history of Australian sheep-farming, nor to the lessons he drew from Dewar's experiences which he applied with considerable

point, for the Laird had his hobbies like every other farmer, but we may attend to his concluding remarks.

“And now, gentlemen, I may be allowed to say that for several reasons it gives me peculiar pleasure to propose the toast for which I request you to fill your glasses. We can all claim an interest in Mr. Dewar because he is a Scotchman, but I have a greater interest in him because he is half a Graham. I wish all the members of our clan deserved success as well as he. Besides our clanship, I think there are many points in which he and I can sympathise with each other. We each started in life with our fortunes to make, and if I had some advantages at the outset, he at least chose a career in which the chances of achieving a speedy and brilliant success

are far greater than any that could have fallen to my lot. Much of my Indian life was very pleasant, but I can tell you that the prospect of toiling for years away from home and friends, is apt to dull one's spirits at times, and I have felt enough of that to understand, perhaps, better than you, some of Mr. Dewar's experiences. Again, he and I set out with much the same ambition—to possess some piece of land we could call our own. Providence fulfilled my wish when I least expected it, and I would not change the old place for twice its worth elsewhere." (Hear, hear! and loud cheers from the audience.) "But I look with esteem and respect on the man who by his own courage and honest labour has made himself possessor of acres, I rather think I might say miles, of virgin-

soil. Thus, gentlemen, as countryman, as clansman, and because of his personal character, I have good reason to be proud of our guest, and I know you will respond heartily to the toast,—the health of Mr. Dewar with Highland honours!”

The clergyman, the only Englishman present, did not understand the meaning of the last injunction, and almost forgot to drink, in his bewilderment at the conduct of the company, as each man sprang on to his chair or bench, and placing one foot on the table, waved his glass, those in the background scrambling up wherever they could find space, and all cheering vociferously.

When the tumult subsided Dewar rose. He was an excellent specimen of that type of Highlander who owes his complexion,

and the best points in his character, to an admixture of Norse blood. Broad-chested, square-shouldered, with fair wavy hair, and frank and humorous blue eyes, "he looked the whole world in the face,"—a man that anyone might trust.

The blue eyes had an unwonted softness in them now, and the cheery voice did not come quite so easily as usual, as he stammered out his thanks in words effective from their very unreadiness. But while he hesitated his eye fell on his mother, leaning forward to listen, and the sight of her homely features restored his composure.

"Invermoy has alluded to the interest Scotchmen take in each other," said he. "Well, I daresay he understands it. But I doubt if anyone does who has never been out of the old country. One day I was

alone on a distant run, and a bit dull, for it was terribly lonesome at times. Things were not going well with me, and I did not see my way, neither through that particular piece of scrub, nor yet to make money enough to get home. As I was sitting down to eat my dinner I heard the branches crackling, and a man came out of them. We stared hard at each other for a minute, and then I suppose we each thought the other looked respectable—which is more than any of you would have done if you had seen us. I asked him if he would have something to eat, and all his answer was, 'Eh, man, you're a Scotchman!' I have not got a delicate hand," said James, stretching out a broad palm, "but the grip I got made it tingle. That man had come miles to find me, because he heard that I



was from home, and he's the head shepherd in charge of my place now. It hasn't always been fine weather with me, you know; sometimes, indeed, it has been too fine, and the sheep died for want of water. Sometimes they died because they had too much of it, when the rivers came down and flooded all the best pastures in a few minutes; but if ever I have the like troubles again, I think the remembrance of this night will help me to keep a stout heart. A man with so many friends ought to be cheery. I see one of them, by-the-by, outside there, who used to think it her duty to give me a good deal of plain advice. She did her duty well, I'll say that for her, but when she prophesied me a happy return, I'm sure she never thought of anything like this. To her and all of

you I again give my heartiest thanks," said James, sitting down.

"I'm mickle obleeged to you, Jamie. Mony a better man's been spoilt for want of an auld wife like me to bid him no mak' a fule o' himsel'," cried the unabashed Kate outside, amid laughter and applause.

To the astonishment of everyone, the speech of the evening was made by Mr. Spait. He waited till all the toasts on the paper had been duly honoured, and then rising, abruptly requested the chairman's permission to propose another.

There was a general movement of surprise, of which the speaker was quite aware.

"Mr. Chairman," said he, "it is said that no man knows what his neighbours think of him, but I can contradict that

saying on two points. I am quite sure that I have not the reputation of a speaker, and that I have the reputation of being hard to please. If I had ever doubted that, I should cease to do so now when I look at the faces about me. Well, gentlemen, I have seen a lady's pet dog—a sleek animal that would be friends with anybody that would overfeed it, beyond even its natural condition, and I've seen what you'd call an ill-faured tyke that, for all his evil looks, never forgot a friend that he had once made. If his 'bark was' *not* 'waur than his bite,' still he didn't bark without some sort of reason. I prefer him, and I hope you do too, as I have a sort of fellow-feeling with him, to the smoother beast. The point of these remarks is that, when our friend Mr.

Dewar was an aspiring clerk in my office, I believe he thought me a very hard master, though, I trust, not an unfair one. Like my friend the dog, I had a shadow of reason. You see, young folk, who go clean off the beaten track, oftener 'spoil a horn' than 'make a spoon;' but Mr. Dewar has not only made his spoon, but he has gilt the handle. I have always rejoiced in his prosperity, but never so heartily as this afternoon, when I helped to conclude arrangements by which he not only becomes possessor of the bit of land on which his father's cottage stands, but sends a deserving young man there to teach the bairns of the clachan in the winter evenings. He takes care that the youngsters of Balmawhustle shall not have as hard a fight to get their learning

as he had himself. Gentlemen, our English neighbours taunt us with our readiness to leave our country, but do they understand the love we feel for it? I say they do not, and I admire the courage that makes Scotchmen, instead of submitting to the hard necessities of climate and poverty, go bravely out into the world as soldiers, traders, settlers, keeping their patriotism always alive. We all know how in the war the deepest disgrace that could be found for our Highland soldiers was to have their names and any grave fault they had committed written up at the door of the kirk in their old homes. Does that look like forgetting their country? No, gentlemen. And Mr. Dewar gives us a fresh instance of the feeling that makes us stand 'shoulder to shoulder

all the world over,' always ready to help each other, and always ready to give some of our hard-earned wealth to the old country. Gentlemen, in the name of the nationality we all share, I beg you to fill your glasses for a toast that will be a fitting conclusion to our meeting. Mr. Dewar, and those of us who come 'from aboon the pass,' will know it in its native form, but I give it in both—' *Tir nam beann nan gleann's nan gaisgeach*—Here's to the land of hills and glens and heroes !”

Mr. Spait had touched in his hearers that tenderness which lurks under the rough, reserved Scottish character, as the tumultuous cheering showed, and the party broke up, fully satisfied that such a successful meeting had not taken place in the village within the memory of man, not

even when Mr. Duncan was born, and the old Laird feasted tenants, labourers, and villagers in turn for two or three days; but then that event was fading into the unknown distance now, and could not be rightly compared with present pleasures.

If James Dewar appeared as a beneficent spirit to the needy, his presence caused no little perturbation among the damsels of the village.

Obviously, a man with a new estate and a good house, as the word was understood in Australia, ought to take a wife with him when he went out again, and Dewar had admitted that such was his intention, if he found anyone to suit him. No wonder, then, that there was a good deal of agitation on the subject, and that everything he said or did was carefully

watched, in order to discover any indication of a preference.

"That's a braw lassie," said he, one day, to Kate Macrae, when, lounging by her counter, he had listened to a colloquy between her and a customer.

"Ou ay, she's braw eneuch. Eh, Jamie, you're causing an awfu' deal o' expense in the toun."

"I! What do ye mean, Kate?"

"Ay, you. There's no been sic a buying o' pearlins and braws in my day afore. The lassies a' think you'll be needin' a wife; gin ye dinna take ane or tither o' them sune, Mr. McRorie wull be tellin' them ane o' these days that there's owre mickle warldliness amang them."

James laughed, a hearty easy laugh, as



he listened and marked the twinkle in Kate's eyes.

"Wad ye no like Janet, noo; she's gotten hersel' a new gown, forbye yon mantle thing she aye wears."

"I'm feared there's no room for mantles in my bit house, Kate. You'd better mention that, in case there's any purchases to make yet," rejoined Dewar.

"Weel, now, gin you'd come wi' me the morn, I'd let ye see the maist wise-like, sonsiest lassie for miles round," said Kate.

Dewar agreed readily; he had not much to do, and Kate's shrewd talk always amused him, so on the following morning, it being the weekly market, the pair went leisurely down the street just as a tall girl carrying a heavy basket emerged from Bright's.

She was dressed with as old-fashioned simplicity as Kate herself. Her short blue petticoat displayed ankles somewhat neater than usually belong to her countrywomen; her print jacket was clean and fresh, and the shining plaits of her fair hair were bound with a plain ribbon.

“How’s a’ wi’ ye the day, Nancy?” said Kate, stopping.

“Brawly, thank ye,” replied the girl, with a quick shy glance at Kate’s companion.

“That’s a by-ordinar heavy basket you’ve gotten,” said Kate, after a little conversation. “You’ll no be carrying that up to the farm?”

“Ou ay, I’ll just need to ca’ canny wi’ it,” was the smiling answer.

“But here’s Jamie Dewar, wi’ naething

to do but just daunner about the streets, he'll gi'e ye a lift wi' it."

"Oh, I wadna think o't," said Nancy, her rosy cheeks growing redder at the idea, but Dewar raised his cap and insisted on relieving her, with a politeness quite new to her experience.

Lifting the well-packed basket, with a growing respect for Nancy's strength of arm, he turned back with her to the upland farm where her father lived, and from which only business ever drew her away. The road was steep, and Dewar at least saw no occasion for hurry, and though Nancy spoke once or twice of the "wark" that was awaiting her, she could hardly hasten on and leave him to bring her groceries.

Nevertheless when he sat down on the

low stone dyke, declaring he needed rest, she remained standing, a bright upright figure on the white road, with the dark firwood and reaches of blue moor behind her.

Clearly she did not mean to waste the time, however her companion might talk, and as he looked at her trim figure and smiling eyes James mentally echoed Kate's praises of her.

"Happy is the wooing that is not long of doing," says the proverb, and in this case at least it spoke truly.

That James should lose greatly in the esteem of the village spinsters when he engaged himself to Nancy Patterson, was only to be expected. But everyone else applauded him, the bachelors because they were glad of the removal of so dangerous

a rival, the matrons because they knew Nancy's worth.

"I'll tell you what, Janet," said Mrs. Murdoch to her aspiring niece, "I'm no like Kate Macrae. I think ilka lassie suld ha'e her braws, and what for no, but when your man's needin' his dinner, it'll no dae him or you ony gude that ye ken how to trim your gown, if ye canna mak' the parritch and the kail. Jamie Dewar's a man o' sense. He's seen Nancy at her wark and tasted the meal puddings at the farm, and he kens fine she's a handy lassie."

To this there was no reply, but Janet, as she pinned up the strings of her bonnet before hanging it on its peg in the press, reflected that after all Australia was an outlandish place, and that she might get

better company at home, even though she should have less "siller."

The preparations for the wedding were soon made at the little farm, for Nancy's father was not a rich man, but the bride had some unexpected additions to her portion, notably a tea-service presented by Invermoy, the sight of which made her comely face beam with gratified pride.

"That's the first of the Dewar family plate," quoth James, smiling, "and I am right glad it is none of our buying, but comes from a friend like Invermoy."

Mr. McHaffie and his partner were not behindhand with their gifts, and as the making of wedding presents had not then become a recognised social tax, the unexpectedness of the giving made it twice as

gracious. How happy the bride and bridegroom were, and how the village rejoiced with them, we cannot stop to tell. But we must take one more glimpse at James Dewar before he and his yellow-haired lassie leave Scotland.

He was walking up and down beneath the Invermoy beeches with the Laird, and something of the gravity of a last meeting was on both their faces.

“There was one thing I wanted to tell you about, Invermoy,” said Dewar, with a slight hesitation. “It was an awful blow to me that I did not win home before your aunt died. I don’t know rightly myself, nor, if I did, could I tell you, how it was that I thought so much of pleasing her. It just seems presumptuous to say it, yet many a time, when I might have done ill

things, I minded me of some of her sayings and her quiet ways, and I held back."

"She would have been glad to have heard you say so. She had the kindest heart I ever knew," replied Allan.

"Ay she had, sir. The way she took it when I told her I had lost that money went near to make me greet. If I had found her living, I wanted to have given her a bit of my earnings out of a kind of thankfulness, for it was in a measure she that sent me to Australia. You can tell well enough what she would have done with it. But now it's lying idle—now," continued he, rather hurriedly, "I'm not one that thinks a man should never be able to do a turn to a friend till after his will is opened. I want your leave to give what I had meant for Miss Mary to her



little grand-niece, Miss Elspeth, if you'll not be offended."

"I see no reason for being offended at a kind intention," answered Allan. "But you must recollect you have a wife now, and I think you should draw in your hand. We need nothing to remind us of you here, Dewar, as you know."

"Ay, I know that; but that doesn't alter my wish. Well, if you would have let me leave the money with you now, I thought maybe you'd use it in your own way; but if you won't, Miss Elspeth must wait the longer, for it will be put down for her all the same."

Graham saw that his companion was hurt, and he stopped in his leisurely walk.

"You do not think I spoke out of any

foolish pride, do you, Dewar? I hope you know me better."

"Well, I thought I did," rejoined Dewar, eyeing him somewhat doubtfully. "Maybe it's a queer thing to propose, but my heart was set on it. You called me a clansman once, Invermoy. I would feel you had meant it real kindly if you'd let me have my way now. I could have left the bit sum with Mr. Spait, and said nothing about it, but that didn't seem the right thing, and I wanted to tell you how it was the thought of Miss Mary had been the reason of well-nigh everything I have done that was worth the doing."

"Well, Dewar, you shall have your way, and I thank you heartily in Elspeth's name and my own. I will ask something of you

in my turn. When you have a bairn of your own to name, call it after Mrs. Graham or me, and keep the Graham blood in mind."

"I'll do that, Invermoy, you may be sure. 'Far from the eyes is near the heart with us,' as the proverb says."

The farewells were spoken not many days after this conversation, and bright Nancy set out on her wonderful new existence, full of quiet courage and faith in her husband, neither of which qualities failed her even among the manifold trials of a settler's life.

She is a handsome matron now, and as she stands at the door of her dwelling, and sees the fair-haired lads, who are growing up around her, coming back from their work or sport, her only wish is that

she could show them all to her aged father, who, she knows, remembers her in his nightly prayer by the warm hearth of the little farm at home.

Her husband is well known now, a man of proved sagacity, who may take his place among the leading colonists. Seeing this, James resolved that his sons should not be launched into the world with only their raw colonial knowledge to guide them. One and all, if he can afford it, shall go home, shall see the humble cottage at Balmawhustle, and the trees where their grandfather sat. (There are only two limes on the grassy knoll now. The sycamore was blown down in a winter storm, but the boys know that it used to be the finest tree of the group.)

They are wonderfully familiar with the

names and characters of places and people their parents once knew, and if they are sure to be frank and fearless critics, they have also that deep-seated, affectionate reverence for the old country that will enable them to profit by their sojourn there.

The eldest one, who is named Allan Graham, is going to Scotland soon, to Mr. McHaffie's care, and will be sent to the Edinburgh high-school, and Nancy thinks in her motherly heart, as she looks at him, that Invermoy himself has not a braver, better son.

Yet it would be hard to find a handsomer or more promising fellow in Scotland than young Ian Graham, as he comes across the home park, and vaulting the fence, sits

down under the chestnut, where his aunt is sewing, while his sister reads aloud.

He has his father's resolute will, combined with quicker intelligence, and Allan Graham has acceded to his strong wish, and is about to send him to one of the English Universities, wisely agreeing that it would be best for him, in these days of progress and travel, to see something of the wider interests of the south.

At present he is enjoying an idle interval, flinging himself heartily into every country pursuit, and earning everywhere those golden opinions that are so lavishly given to youth and health.

He has been hard at work in the hay-fields to-day, for it is "grand weather," as Gillanders says, and they take time by the

forelock at Invermoy. His father is there still, watching the loading of the last carts, but the boy has come away that he may have a canter before dinner, and he tells Elspeth to shut up her book and come too. Nothing loth, she obeys, and soon the two ride down the shady avenue, as happy a pair as parent's eye could wish to see, and so Ellen thinks, as she looks after them, and begins to gather up her work. Just then an eager shout resounds through the shrubberies, and curly-headed Allister rushes up to her, followed by a brown retriever.

“Aunt Ellen, I shot two couple of rabbits to-day, and Hume says I am getting on famously!”

“Well done, Ally,” replies his aunt.  
“You are doing quite as well as Ian used

to do. Is he going out with you to-morrow?"

"Not he. He's going to ride with the Buchanans. It's an awful shame of him to be away there with a lot of girls, when I'm only at home for such a short holiday."

"You don't call Frank and Robert Buchanan girls, do you?" said Ellen, smiling.

"Well, not exactly," laughed Allister. "But I don't believe he is going to ride with them, for I know that it was Muriel asked him to come, the day she was over here at luncheon."

"Ah, I daresay he will go with you some other day. You do not go back to school for a fortnight yet," said Ellen, consolingly, and the boy was obliged to be satisfied with this hope.



When Allan Graham was young the lady who then reigned at Glenmoy Castle grudged him his English wife, for she thought it would have been far more fitting if the owner of Invermoy had married in the neighbourhood. Indications were not wanting that her hopes might be fulfilled by the next generation, for Ian Graham was always ready to go to the Castle, and, in pretty Muriel Buchanan's eyes, was as a young prince whose royal qualities no one need aspire to equal. He in his turn could hardly conceal his astonishment when a guest who was a great favourite with his aunt declared emphatically that no lady in the country-side was so sweet or fair as Miss Elspeth Graham.

Ian loved his sister dearly, and thought

her all a sister ought to be, but he considered it a species of madness that anybody should pronounce her superior to Muriel.

Nevertheless, he rejoiced secretly at the decision, and became far more cordial to their visitor when he saw that he need not look upon him as a possible rival at the Castle.

He did not altogether relish the notion of his sister marrying a foreigner, but there was plenty of time to think about that, and meanwhile Antonio d'Arblanc was a pleasant companion, as Elspeth also found.

Some years back Antonio had been a delicate boy outgrowing his strength and in need of a bracing climate, and Ellen had

persuaded Concha to entrust him to her care. Even then his pretty childish allegiance had been given to Elspeth, and now that he had come back for a second visit, full of pride in his soft moustache and his commission in the *lanciers rouges*, the mutual liking appeared to be unchanged. Ellen and her brother-in-law loved the lad's mobile countenance with its sensitive mouth and truthful eyes that so strongly resembled his mother's, and thought that at some future day he might be a fitting guardian for their treasure.

It was fortunate, too, that Elspeth was something of an heiress, for the "bit sum" spoken of so modestly by James Dewar had proved to be far larger than Allan had imagined possible, and had been carefully

nursed as part of her dowry. Therefore, though young d'Arblanc would own little save the family patrimony in Normandy and his soldier's trifling pay, Elspeth, if she ultimately accepted him, would be well enough off, and if prepared for it from the beginning, might easily reconcile herself to a foreign life.

Altogether fortune smiled on the Grams, though Allan in the midst of his happiness would sometimes think longingly of the tender wife he had lost, and wonder if, from some other world, she were looking down on her children's blooming lives.

"Everything has gone well with us since that visit to London," said he to Ellen one evening, when the young folk

were clustered round the piano, and he had been watching them and listening to the familiar Scottish airs. "Things never went so smoothly before. It is as if a curse had been removed from me when that miserable letter was destroyed."

"We have certainly known no trouble worth the name since then," replied Ellen, raising her head from her work.

"No doubt we shall have our share of it yet some day or other, but I think we have all stout enough hearts, and trust enough in each other, to meet it," rejoined Allan, quietly, and his sister-in-law assented.

He was right; whatever troubles befell the family were endured with patience,

and whatever mistakes its members committed were atoned for as far as might be, for the elders of the house had known how to profit by their own experience, and had taught the children never to shrink from worthy effort nor to fear avowal of a fault.

Kate Macrae lived to so great an age that she came to be regarded as a kind of curiosity, or glossary of antique words and ideas. Being forced by increasing stiffness to give up attending customers, she engaged an assistant, whom she watched with lynx eyes from the huge chair, bought with Dewar's gift, that stood in the corner of the shop. She was sharp and sometimes suspicious, but not

unkind in the matter of "outings" and other relaxations, for she had chosen her aid with her usual skill, and described her as "no a lassie, for a lassie wad aye be rinnin out wi' the lads. Nor yet an auld wife, for she'd aye think she kent better nor me, but a douce wise-like body, that's got nae gude looks to gar her think o' hersel', and hasna the gift o' the gab to gar her forget the shop."

When the railway enabled tourists to visit Invermoy, Kate's name became more widely known, and often a traveller would buy a cake or scone at her counter so as to get a sight of her wrinkled face or a word from her caustic tongue.

One young man, fired with the hope of imitating the "great unknown," whose

graphic descriptions were beginning to delight the world, went to Invermoy on purpose to see her, and engaged her in conversation. Not choosing to trust his memory, nor dreaming that Kate would feel herself otherwise than honoured, he produced a note-book, and began to write down her remarks.

The old woman's eyes flashed for one moment, but in the next she had recovered herself, and laughed a low chuckling laugh.

"Maggie," said she, to her assistant, "the young gentleman's come to the wrang hoose, tak him owre yonder to McHaffie and Spait."

"What did you say, Mrs. Macrae," asked the visitor, pausing, pencil in hand.



“I sell fancy breid, young man, no fancy notions,” quoth Kate, pointing to the door with her gnarled hazel stick, “ye can gang to the writers oot by, they’ll let ye ha’e as mony words as ye like, and send ye in the bill !”

There was no mistaking Kate’s meaning, and with an embarrassed apology the young author went away.

When he was gone she laughed again, for she had got over her annoyance.

“The gomeril,” said she, “it’ll no be a milk-faced loon like yon that’ll get leave to pit my sayins in a buik. I’ve maybe as mickle sense as ither folk, but he’d turn a sayin’ round and serve it up like parritch that’s no boiled and wi nae salt to gi’e it a taste. Na, na, my man, if auld

Kate Macrae wad haver wi' *you*, she'd be sic a fule that naebody wad need to listen till her."

I have reason to think that a more congenial writer succeeded where the youth aforesaid failed, and possibly some of Kate's saws may yet see the light.

After her death a certain flatness was perceptible in the village gatherings, the talk speedily sank to the dead level from which her keen sense had so often saved it, and a village era may be said to have closed.

The new times that succeeded certainly had their merits, for they inherited the wisdom of the past, but I doubt whether in the continual coming and going, the brief acquaintanceships and frequent

friendships that became the fashion, I doubt, I say, whether people could appreciate their neighbours or flavour their conversation as shrewdly as they did in the good old days.

THE END.

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